

Andrew
A
NOVEL

By
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One

‘BUT IT IS NOT FAIR!’ he had screamed so often, stamping his little foot. Little foot no longer; not for years. And now, instead of looking up at his father, as he used to do in his rants, or even looking over at him, he now looked down at him. His father’s head barely reached to the top of his shoulders.

He had learned by now to say nothing, but he still thought what he had thought back then—and so many times since. At first, the answer was, “Simon is bigger than you; be patient and you will be able to do it (whatever “it” happened to be at the moment). But as time went on, he began to catch up with Simon in height and overall size (and in ability to do “it,” whatever “it” was), and then the answer changed to, “Simon is older than you. You will understand later.” He ranted at the beginning, because nothing could convince him that it was *not* fair, just because Simon was bigger, or older, or whatever else they wanted to use for an excuse for unjust favoritism; but it never did any good, and it festered and festered, though he finally had enough sense to keep his mouth shut.

As it was festering now in his mind, and as he said nothing and looked up from his sandals down at his father. He did not even protest, with anything more than a sullen glance, because it never did any good. His father ignored him—he always did—and went on with what he had been saying, expecting Andrew to listen politely and then agree. “So the two of you will have your own boat now that you are both men. I will take the hired hands into my boat, and we will buy a two-man boat, and you will—” He knew it was coming, and sure enough, it came— “take the oars, and Simon the net and . . .”

He went on explaining how it was to be, and how Andrew was to have no say in the matter, because John was the father, and Simon the older brother, and that was that; but everything inside Andrew screamed, “But it is not *fair!*” and he longed to stomp his now huge foot and roar at his father, “Everyone *knows* that I am better at throwing out the net! Everyone *knows* that we can catch more fish if I throw the net! Simon is nowhere *near* as good at it as I am!” But it would be a waste of breath. Simon was older, and besides, Andrew was stronger, and could manage the oars better—which was certainly true. But what was more important? Getting to the fishing grounds a little earlier, or throwing out a net that was more likely to catch something? It was not fair!

It made what should have been a joy and a delight bitterness and ashes. He had so looked forward to the day when they would have their own boat and his father would not be looking over at them and whispering criticisms at Andrew and encouragement at Simon (one never spoke aloud when in the boats for fear of frightening the fish). But of course, it did not matter. The fact was that Andrew was better than Simon in

all aspects of fishing, and so he should be doing what was the more productive task; but Simon was the older brother, and that meant that Simon would have the more dramatic duty.

He wondered if his father even realized that Simon got almost nothing but encouragement and he received almost nothing but corrections of his mistakes—which were legion, it seemed. Finally, more in exasperation than anything else, he began listening to his father and following the corrections, and, certainly, they became fewer and fewer as the years went on—it was hard to criticize when there was nothing to criticize, though his father seemed to manage somehow, and though Simon still needed as much reassurance, it seemed, because the support kept coming. To be fair, Simon also seemed to profit from encouragement in his own rather inept way, and became more skilled—or less unskilled, and so the two of them grew better and better at what they were doing.

A thought flickered for a moment in Andrew's mind. Perhaps his father knew what he was doing. But it was quickly drowned out with the thought, "But it is not *fair!*"

When they were in the boat, away from their father, Andrew at first tried to set Simon straight on some aspect of what he was doing badly; but all he got in reply was a glare that said, "And who do you think *you* are, to be telling your older brother what to do?" Andrew longed to send a look back that would say, "Someone who knows what he is about!" but he only looked down at his feet and sulked—something which Simon never bothered to notice.

Eventually, however, he realized that, though Simon bristled at any correction or suggestion for improvement on Andrew's part, and often deliberately did the wrong thing

again out of spite, after a day or two when the incident was apparently forgotten, he would take up Andrew's suggestion, as if hoping that Andrew would not notice. But he did notice, and was both happy and annoyed at the outcome. Happy, because Simon had actually listened to him, and annoyed because Simon would have put his hand into the fire rather than admit it.

But since, even with the hired hands in the boat, it was foreordained that Simon would be throwing the net, Andrew pondered how he could induce him to do it acceptably—or, to be fair again, more acceptably. There was no point in fomenting strife, because Andrew was the one who felt it; Simon, after reacting with hostility, promptly forgot the conflict. That was another thing that was not fair. It was Andrew who was in the right, and *he* was the one that got insulted, even though often enough Simon eventually took his advice. And the insult in Simon's glare rankled, mainly because it was so unjust.

Why could there not be a world in which there was *justice*? Andrew did not want to be superior, he told himself, merely not be treated as if he were just "the little brother" when he was head and shoulders above his "big" brother not only physically but in practically every other way. And then they graduated to a real boat, with two hired hands of their own—but Andrew still rowed, and Simon still threw out the net.

It dawned on him after a year or two that his father's treatment of Simon might actually be the most effective way to deal with him. Perhaps it was not simple favoritism (though Andrew was convinced there was a good deal of that in it), but his father's realization of the difference between his two sons.

So as a kind of experiment, one day Andrew, instead of saying, “Look; if you hold the net in that way, it will not spread out properly when you throw it. Try it thus,” he whispered, “That was almost a perfect cast! Do it in that way, but lead with your left shoulder a bit next time.”

And Simon *smiled* at him and actually did what he said—and the net flew gracefully from his hands and spread out perfectly in the water! It galled Andrew to have to be praising what was mediocre, but it seemed that was the way to bring it from mediocre to rather good, and (who knew?) perhaps even better.

But it was not fair. Why should he have to cajole Simon into doing the right thing? Why could *he* not take over and do it himself, and let Simon do the rowing? Who cared if there was a splash or two while they were getting toward the place where the fish were? Simon knew enough to ply the oars quietly when they reached the place.

Oh, well. After these few years together, they were already doing almost as well as his father and his hired hands, who were considerably less skilled than either of them, and (since the hired hands were stupid and were *hired* to boot, they neither had the ability nor the inclination to improve) it looked as if in the near future that Simon and Andrew would surpass them. Not that this was a tremendous accomplishment; but it made life more bearable. In fact, rather pleasant.

“You seem to be enjoying yourself,” remarked Simon as they were rowing back to the dock with their load of fish squirming in the vat in the middle of the boat. “Well, it is a beautiful day, and we did well, the two of us,” answered Andrew, refraining from adding, “no thanks to you,” because

Simon had not been at his best that day, to say the least; but Andrew had directed the boat to a new fishing-ground, which turned out to be quite productive.

And when they got the boat beached, their father actually praised them, looking pleased at Andrew and patting Simon on the back, as he said, “Well done. Well done.” Then he added as a kind of afterthought, “And we will perhaps be better in the future, because I have begun talks with Zebedee to unite our two businesses into one. There is an empty house next to them there in Capernaum, and it would be more convenient for us, because it is closer to everything than Bethsaida; and your mother likes Zebedee’s wife, and so there would be no problem on her side if we moved. I know not. There are many things to consider, but I thought I should let you know that we have some tentative plans we are pondering. Both of us, Zebedee and I, seem to think that we would be better off if we united rather than stayed rivals.”

Simon reacted with his customary impulsiveness that James was a good friend of his and would make a superb partner, and young John seemed to be a good enough boy, “very bright, and already strong as a young ox, or like Andrew here, though it does not look as if he is going to grow as big.” John had only recently had his *bar mitzvah* and emerged as a man, which was tantamount to saying that he had become someone one could pay attention to. To anyone but the family themselves, children were like the animals that wandered around the house; one ignored them, merely hoping that they did not create a mess or a fuss one had to deal with.

“Well, we shall see. It is still very much just an idea, but I think it a good one,” said Zebedee.

Andrew, after some thought, also felt it a good one. He had noticed John once look admiringly at him, and the glance warmed him. He doubted he could really be a friend of John's, since he was four or five years older, but he was pretty well convinced that he could get along with him, and even work with him if it ever came to that. He had nothing against James, other than that he was inclined to be a bit hot-headed (as was John, for that matter), but he doubted James would ever try to vent his wrath on him, since he was so much bigger—and, to be fair, James had always been friendly whenever they had met. No, it would work out nicely.

But there were the chores to be done, seeing to the fish and pulling them out of the vat (the hired hands took care of a good deal of this) as the women pointed to the ones they wanted, and handing them to them to put in their sacks, which they seated on their heads as they hurried home to clean and cook them while they were still fresh. The women always chose the fish last, so that they would not spoil as they were looking for other things such as vegetables to go with the meal; those could last nicely for days, but a fish had to be cooked as soon as it died, or it would not taste good. Salted fish would last longer, but the general opinion was that salted and smoked fish were far inferior to fresh—though, to be sure, there were some who preferred them.

Nothing happened for several days after this, but then their father told them to help pack for a move to Capernaum. He had hired several donkeys and a couple of carts to transport their possessions, and the two young men and the hired hands pitched in with a will, especially after they saw the house, which was bigger than the one they were living in, with rooms for

each of them. It would be pleasant not to have to share quarters with Simon. After spending all day with him, it would be a relief to get off by oneself and think about—and it then occurred to Andrew that he had nothing much to think about. His life was already fixed, though he had but twenty-five years, and after moving his furniture—his own furniture—into his room—his own room—as he looked out of his window—his own window—at his own view of the lake they called the Sea of Galilee (in Bethsaida they had been much farther away), he looked out at his future, which would be the same as his present, until he became like his grandfather and no longer could fish, and simply sat and looked out at his past until he died.

It occurred to him to wonder if this was all there was to life: every day the same as the last, with only storms and such varying the routine. Even summer and winter were not that different from each other, with the lake there to temper the climate. It was a good enough life, he supposed; he liked fishing, and he supposed that his father was a decent enough father, in spite of his favoritism, and even Simon was easy enough to get along with, since he never lorded it over Andrew. *That* would have been intolerable; but Simon was too—not exactly stupid, but unnoticing—to realize that he was being favored. In fact, there were times when Andrew actually thought that Simon was a bit in awe of him; Andrew's natural superiority managed to worm its way into Simon's consciousness occasionally, though he tried to hide it, because, after all, he *was* the older brother.

Andrew sat on the bed for a while, still looking out of the window—*his* window—and lapsing into a state without

thought, until Simon called that he had finished with his own room, and it was time to go back for another load. His father and the hired hands, along with occasional help from Zebedee and his sons, were also loading up the two other donkey-carts and taking them back and forth. Actually, the whole operation only took two days, since there was not really that much to transport; and in the meantime, the two families began to get acquainted.

Once installed, they had a little party, where they discussed the arrangement of the fishing business. Nothing much would change, but they would pool their efforts and share the profits equally. It was hoped that the profits would be a little bigger now that they could operate more efficiently. “And John can manage the oars of their new two-man boat rather well now.” said Zebedee, as they walked in front of his house. “This is the boat they started with,” he said, showing a neat little boat—almost a toy—that he had beside his front door like a trophy, “that I had built for them when they were too young to manage a real one. When they outgrew it, I could not bear to sell it, and so we kept it here as a kind of memento. They both loved it—they still do, and so do I, for that matter.” He looked at it proudly.

Andrew’s father asked who had built it, and Zebedee answered, “Joseph, the carpenter up the hill in Nazareth.”

“Ah, yes, I have heard of him. They say he is very good, and by the looks of this, they are right. It has many more years left. It looks sad that it is not out on the water.”

“His son Jesus helped him; it was a joy to see them work. They almost spoke to the wood—or it was as if the wood was talking back to them also. It was fascinating. And you are right

about the fact that it should be out on the sea, where it belongs. But we have no time for joy-rides, and to get it out there, I would have to sell it, and I simply cannot bring myself to do so.”

“Well, I can see how you would want to keep it—and why it would be difficult to sell in any case; it is something for children, and there are few who would have enough to spare to buy such a treasure for their children to have fun in.”

“It was not all fun for James and John, of course. They learned a good deal in it; and they missed it when I bought the boat they now use—especially John, because he was rowing, and at the beginning, he ached rather severely; he was no Andrew at first, though he is strong enough now.”

“Yes, Andrew can handle almost anything I give him to do; he is as good as any two men.”

Andrew, who overheard this conversation, glowed. He had not realized that his father was aware of his abilities.

Two

The merger occurred, but it made very little difference to Andrew and Simon, who still had the same men in their boat. They went to new fishing-grounds every now and then, at Zebedee's suggestion (and Zebedee and his sons followed their own advice sometimes also); but more often than not, they separated, to take advantage of different parts of the "sea."

Andrew's father remarked one day that it seemed that young John might be going to a distant relative in Jerusalem to study to be a rabbi.

"In truth?" said Andrew. "I had no idea he had ambitions to become a scholar." He had, of course, spoken to him a few times as they gathered to go out to fish or came home with the catch, but it was mainly small talk.

"Oh yes," answered the father. "Zebedee told me that he already knows how to read, and spends much of his spare time at home with a scroll that—Isaac, I think it is, who is teaching him to read—lends him." Andrew was impressed. He had had friendly feelings with John because the boy seemed to look up

to him, and here he was, someone who could *read*.

“And I have been thinking. Our two businesses are doing well enough so that we ought to formalize the merger between them, with agreements that will take care of what happens in case of accidents and so on.”

“Do you really think we need a formal agreement? We are friends, are we not?”

“True, but when there is money involved, it is always better to be on the safe side. Zebedee agrees, and so does Simon. So we should take care of it.” Andrew was unmoved by Simon’s opinion, but Zebedee seemed to have some sense.

“So it might be good this summer some time to take a few days off and go to Jerusalem to get the legal situation taken care of. I will stay here with the hired hands, and you and Simon can go. And you can bring John with you. I gather he is to spend a week or so at the house of this Annas, to see if the life as a rabbi suits him, or whether he would be more content to stay a fisherman. From what he said, I think Zebedee would prefer to have him come back, but his wife—of course—is pushing in the other direction. But Zebedee wisely decided that rather than just send him, they would give him a week’s trial, and then have him take a month back here to think things over and make up his mind—always supposing that he is talented enough for them to accept him. Zebedee is confident that they will, but then he would be so.”

“Does Simon know all this?” said Andrew, in some surprise that he was not there.

“Oh, yes, I consulted him two or three times.” And then came and *told* me, thought Andrew. Typical.

“It is not fixed as yet,” he said, “but it looks as if Zebedee

is going ahead with sending John, and that would be a good opportunity to get the legal matters settled.”

And so they would be going to Jerusalem for some other reason than one of the feasts. Well, it would be a diversion. Apparently, it would be just Simon, Andrew, and John, which would make things pleasant—though it would be a pity to lose him. Still, perhaps he would not like the life of sitting inside by a lamp all day, poring over some scroll or other, and then preaching in the synagogue. Well, what would be would be.

One day shortly after that, the two hired hands in Andrew’s boat got sick. They discussed trying to fish with just Andrew and Simon, but then Zebedee said, “Why do you not take in James and John, until they get better? It will only be for a few days, and I think we can do better with one boat less, rather than struggling with that huge boat and only the two of you.”

The next day, they got together, and Andrew looked down at John, whose head reached his chest, and said, “So you are the scholar.”

“Well, I read a little.”

“Zebedee says you will not be with us much longer; you will be going to Jerusalem to study to be a rabbi.”

John’s eyes widened. His father had evidently told him nothing of this. “Indeed?” he managed to say finally.

“Oh, has he not told you? He knows that Simon and I are going to Jerusalem next month, and he asked us if we would mind taking you with us, so that you could be introduced to—someone named Annas, I think he said.”

“My mother is some kind of relative of his.”

“Who is this Annas?”

“I know not, for certain. I think he is a priest, and even in the Sanhedrin, and I think some kind of important person there. My mother thinks he might be able to help me, I believe.”

“Well, if your father has not told you, do not mention that I spoke of it. It may come to nothing.”

As they went out to fish, Andrew rowed, of course, and James and Simon took the nets. John made the nets ready for James and Simon to cast, being sure there were no tangles, so that the nets would fall into a neat trap for the fish. And, since it was a hot day, they had all stripped for comfort. Andrew felt rather than saw John behind him as he rowed, and he made his muscles ripple, to impress John, in case he was looking. At least he was strong, if he could not read. John was strong too, because he rowed with James, but he had but sixteen years or so, and so Andrew was showing him what he could develop into.

And after the day was over, Andrew, walking beside John, put his huge, sweaty arm on John’s shoulder, with his hand grasping the top of his arm, and pulled him over to himself. “We make quite a team, do we not?” he said, with a smile.

“Well, I tried,” John said hesitantly, as if he had some difficulty breathing. Andrew noticed it, but did not make anything out of it. He gripped his biceps, and said, “Perhaps you could spell me at the oars every now and then.”

“I would—I would be happy to do so, if you think I could.”

“Oh, I think you could manage very well. If you can row your own boat by yourself, you can, especially with that arm of yours, do all right with this one, unless a storm comes up.”

John glowed, and Andrew gave him a little punch in the shoulder as he parted, and said, "We will see you tomorrow also, I think. The two you are replacing said they were getting better this morning, but they will need at least another day or two."

The next day, John also went out with Simon and Andrew, and this time did a bit of rowing in the calm waters after they had reached their destination. John knew, of course, how to ply the oars in such a way that there was minimal disturbance to the fish; and Andrew clearly knew how to arrange the nets so that they could easily be cast. He did not say that he was giving John the job of rowing so that he could take the job John had and expedite the number of fish caught, but the fact was, they were in business, and had to make a profit. John did not appear to notice; he was perhaps too busy with the oars.

And once again afterwards, Andrew rested his arm on John's shoulder and remarked at what a good team they made, saying that probably that was the last day they would be thus together, and that, though he hoped no one would become sick again, if ever anyone did, he knew whom to look to for help. James was also there, and received what he said with affectionate understanding, and they went on to the market to sell their catch.

As they parted, Andrew thought with pleasure how he liked young John, and how much John seemed to like him. He would miss him when they went back to their usual occupations.

That evening, a neighbor told them that Samuel and Thomas, two other fishers, twins, sons of Malachi, were

missing, and Simon and Andrew left to join a search party before it grew too dark to see on the lake. But they had barely started when someone shouted from the shore that the search was over. "One of them is dead," the man shouted, "—I know not which, they are so the same. They were found on the shore."

"Is the other one safe?" John, who was almost to the shore, cried in anguish. Was John a friend of them?

"Malachi found them, and he is saying nothing. He wishes no assistance. He says that he will take care of it himself. We are to go home, he says. He is, of course, devastated."

So those who were in boats re-anchored them, and went back to their houses, wondering what had happened, and why Malachi did not want their help. At least one of his sons was dead, and the other must be injured or something. No one could understand it.

Andrew looked over at John, who was absolutely overwhelmed. He longed to go over and console him, but what could he say? In the end, since John had not even seen him, he turned and went home.

As the night wore on, rumors began to spread. It seemed that Samuel, dead, and Thomas were found on the shore near where they were accustomed to anchor their boat, and the boat, and even the oars, had drifted up beside them, the boat, some said, overturned, while others said it had been righted and beached.

Thomas, it was said, was naked, and was completely drunk, with an empty wine pouch of some sort over his privates. This was attested to by a companion of Malachi, who only caught a glimpse of the situation before Malachi bellowed

for him to leave immediately, that he would see to everything himself and wanted no help, no help at all.

Before he was driven away, the man got the briefest of looks at Samuel's head, with a huge ugly gash on it; it seemed to him that he would have to have bled quickly to death.

There were some who had known or suspected that Thomas had a drinking problem, and understood and sympathized with Malachi, who they later, it was reported, watched from a considerable distance (out of sight of him) put a covering over Thomas and carry him, all but a corpse, the short distance to their house, after which he came back for the body of poor Samuel, and took him inside also. He then came back, and some said righted the boat and put the oars inside it, and wept over it as he beached it properly.

The following day, which happened to be a Sabbath, no one, of course, went out to fish; but they probably would not have gone in any case, in sympathy for the tragedy, which had stunned the whole fishing community. While at the synagogue, they heard that the funeral for Samuel was to take place on the morrow. Zebedee, of course, said that he and his family would attend, as did Simon and Andrew's father.

As they approached to offer condolences after the funeral, Andrew saw John, a complete wreck, who had clearly not slept that night, and was incapable of saying anything to Malachi and his wife, merely holding a hand of each and looking tearfully into each face, turning away before he broke down completely. The mother's face spoke volumes, but the father was like flint, and merely grunted whenever sound was called for. Andrew and everyone else did what had to be done, because it had to be done, but did no more, the parents because they were

incapable of it, and everyone else not to cause any more distress than absolutely necessary.

There was something very catastrophic about all this to John. Andrew, who was concerned for him, but who did not want to approach him, lest John might think he considered him a crybaby, saw him go apart to a woman to speak to her.

“Who is that?” asked Andrew in a whisper to someone beside him.

“Her name is Mary, wife of Joseph the carpenter. They tell me that he built the boat that John used when he was a boy, and John became quite a friend of hers for some reason.”

Andrew nodded. Clearly, John went to her for advice, and from the conversation, which Andrew watched from a distance, she seemed to comfort him somewhat. He wondered what it was all about; it was almost as if John felt responsible somehow. Or perhaps he and the dead twin had been good friends. At this, he felt a slight twinge of jealousy, which he immediately shook off. Why should John not have friends of his own age?

But it was nearing the time of preparation for the trip to Jerusalem, and Simon and Andrew took John aside during the evenings to discuss the journey, since John had no experience with such matters. It would work out well, they agreed. John was to have a week with a school in the High Priest’s house—palace, it seemed—and during that time, Andrew and Simon would negotiate with the lawyers about how the business would belong to both families, and consult those they knew in Jerusalem.

“And you know how lawyers are,” said Simon. “We will be lucky if we are through all the complications they can make

in merely a week. So on our part, it will be no problem if you stay a week at this school of yours; you might even have to wait for us, though I hope not more than a day or two. And of course, we can see a few sights that we do not visit during the festivals, if you would like.” John of course agreed. He seemed nervous, but who would not, if his whole life was to change direction?

As to what they were to bring with them, Andrew noticed one day at John’s house that John, like all inexperienced travelers, was starting to load himself up with things that might be useful, but were anything but necessary. In this, he was abetted by his mother, who, of course, fretted that he might find himself in Jerusalem lacking some superfluity that he had at home. Andrew set him straight by saying when the mother was in a different room, “Women are not like men; they want to bring with them whatever they could possibly use, while men only want whatever they know they cannot do without. Why would you want more than one change of clothes? You wear one while the other is in the wash. Who cares if it is not the latest fashion? Those you meet will know you are on a trip, and will make allowances.”

“That has reason,” said John, eyeing the pile of clothes he and his mother had picked out.

“Remember, you are the donkey who is going to have all of this on his back the whole way, and it is a long walk. Now let us look through these and see what is essential and what is not.” And they pawed through the pile, discarding this and that, with the result that John had remarkably little to burden himself with. When he later showed to his mother what he had decided to bring, she remonstrated, “But you can certainly use

this there!” and he answered, “But I do not *need* it there, and if I do not, why burden my donkey?”

“And that actually silenced her!” he said gleefully to Andrew the next day. Andrew smiled. John was a perceptive lad, he thought.

In one of these preparatory sessions, Andrew happened to remark that he had heard that there was a hermit who had come from the desert and was preaching by the Jordan river near Jerusalem, and bathing people in the river “for them to change their way of thinking,” because the one who was anointed to be the successor of David was apparently on his way to assume the throne of Israel, or some such thing. Andrew, when he had first heard it, had begun daydreaming, engaging in some far-fetched wishful thinking, that perhaps, if the prophecies were true, an era might come in which justice would flourish on the earth. And that Andrew, for one, might move from second place behind his brother, just because his brother had been born first. After all, look at Jacob and Esau. He had tried to squelch the idea as ridiculous; but there it was.

“But do you think that there is anything to this?” asked John, when he brought up the subject. “After so many years—centuries?”

“Who knows?” was the reply. “The Prince must come sometime. Why should it not be now?”

“Of course, why *should* it be now? Everyone has been saying this from time immemorial.”

“But would it not be exciting if it were to happen in our time? What would we do? What would it be like?”

“True,” said John, musing. “It would be foolish simply to dismiss it.” Andrew himself had heard many tales of those who

were predicting the advent of the Prince, all of which came to nothing; so he also was inclined to be skeptical. But still, one of these times had to be the right one, just as when men pooled their money for a wager, one of them *did* win, even though it never was Andrew. “And,” he reflected, “he does say that we must change the way we think.” As if that really made any difference, he thought to himself.

“And you say he bathes people?”

“So I was told. In the river. It is a symbolic way of washing our past off us, and making us ready for the future.”

John was silent. Andrew saw his meditating face, and wondered if this had anything to do with his concern about Samuel and Thomas. Bah! It was all nonsense! Still . . .

So after a pause, Andrew added, “But I think,” breaking into his reflection, “that we should at least go and see this John—”

“Is that his name? John?”

“So I heard.”

“Then by all means we should go to see him.”

“Oh naturally, if he is called John, then anything he does or says can only be wonderful!” And he punctuated this with a playful punch on John’s shoulder. John returned this one, and Andrew smiled once again. They understood each other well, it seemed.

Three

They then resumed discussing more of the practical details of their trip, which was almost as much of an exciting adventure for Andrew and Simon as it was for John. They very rarely left Galilee except to go to Jerusalem for the great feasts such as Passover, when, it seemed, the whole country emptied itself out into the Temple environs as it recalled the wonderful event of the escape from slavery to the Egyptians and the passage on dry land through the Red Sea. And at those times, there were such crowds that strangers like them were overwhelmed, and wanted nothing more than to get back to the comparative sanity of Galilee, where people were not treading on each others' heels, and elbowing each other out of the way, and especially did not speak with strange accents hard to understand. Some even spoke Greek, not Aramaic.

And if John was nervous about his new life, Andrew, at least, was nervous about the meeting with the lawyers. He did not feel at all confident that he would be able to persuade anyone of anything, and had a feeling that he and Simon were

children wandering into adult territory, where clever talkers could take advantage of them. He had no idea how they would manage this, but where money was involved, his father was right; one had to guard each shekel, or one would find himself not only with none, but owing everything he could earn for the rest of his life.

Simon, it seemed, was not concerned about this. He dismissed Andrew's mention of his fears with, "Nonsense! If they start in with whereases and wherefores, I will simply tell them, 'Explain what that means in Aramaic, and write it down thus, or we will not agree to anything. You will see.'" Andrew hoped so, but he was afraid that Simon, though he *could* read, after a fashion, was dense enough not to realize that apparently straightforward language could be as easy to twist as complicated legalese. Still, it was only that the two families wanted to be partners, and in itself it was a simple thing.

He hoped.

Two days before they left, John disappeared, and when Andrew and Simon asked at his house where he had gone, his mother said, "He went up the hill to Nazareth to see Joseph's Mary; he has become very fond of her, and he wanted to ask her something before he went to Jerusalem. She is a very wise woman, and whatever is bothering him, I am sure she can set his mind at rest. He will return a little after dark."

Well, that confirmed that something serious was on John's mind, as Andrew suspected. He hoped that the lady would again assuage what was bothering him. Fortunately, there was little to do in these last minutes, and so the two men merely finished up details, consulted with their father and Zebedee about how to handle various contingencies, and

waited. John did show up that night, and it did seem that he was somewhat calmer, if a little bewildered. Andrew longed to ask him what was the matter, but since he had not confided in him, he could find no way to broach the subject. The only hint about it was that John said the next day, “We must not forget to see that prophet, or whatever he is, after my week.”

“You mean John?” asked Andrew with a mischievous smile.

“Oh, was that his name?” said John, with the same look. “I had forgotten.” And they traded punches on their shoulders.

“You will need him. If he bathes people in the Jordan, you will have to wash off the smell of lamp-oil and sheepskin before you go back to at least a month of civilized work like fishing.” It occurred to Andrew that John would probably have to wash off the smell of fish when he got to the High Priest’s palace. No one here noticed it, but they all probably reeked of it. But he decided not to mention it to John, not to create something new to be shy about. They *did* bathe every day—something easy enough since they were on a lake, and very often without clothes as they worked—but it was one thing to jump in the water and rub oneself, and another to get rid of a smell that had probably entered their pores. Oh, well; he would lose the odor soon, Andrew suspected, especially if the Judeans washed with soap as well as water.

In any case, their last-minute preparations and in John’s case the prospect of a whole new life crowded out the worries they all had, and the day of departure was soon upon them, and they began their journey before dawn.

They decided that they could make better time if they

went straight through Samaria rather than following the Jordan River valley through the “Arabah,” as they called the green trench that divided the mountains of nothing but dirt on either side. That route would have been hotter, and they would have to climb the mountains from Jericho to Jerusalem at the end. “And there will not be much danger,” said Simon, “if we go through Samaria, because there are three of us, and we present a rather formidable aspect.” Certainly Andrew and to a lesser extent John did. The Samaritans, descendants of the Philistines and other hostile tribes, had no love for Judeans, even those semi-Judeans who were Galileans, and the feeling in general was returned with interest by the descendants of Jacob.

“Besides,” added Andrew, “we should reach Sychar by nightfall, and there they let us drink from Jacob’s well, and are even willing to sell us food. That was why we did not pack so much.”

They made good progress on that first day, since they had not been fishing for three days now and were well rested. And so they strode along at a rather brisk pace; they were all in good physical condition, even Simon, who did not do much rowing. Andrew was amused at how John tried to match strides with him, which involved much stretching of his legs. He would be sore on the morrow, but it would be good for him.

As they expected, no one bothered them—in fact, they saw few people, since most were busy on the farms—and they were able to refresh themselves at the well and sleep after buying provisions in Sychar. No one even expressed curiosity about them; the Samaritans knew who they were, and wanted to have as little to do with them as possible once they had taken their money. They slept out in the open, not even having

bothered to bring a tent, and fortunately it did not rain.

As they reached Jerusalem, they went up into the Temple to pay their respects to the Master, and then agreed that they would meet there a week later and established a corner where they could be found. As John left to begin his great adventure, Andrew looked after him marching resolutely away, not even looking back, obviously totally absorbed in what he was about to face. Andrew felt proud of him, and, it must be said, a bit sorry for him also; for someone used to such an active life, it would have to be rather boring. But then, perhaps that was what he was cut out to do—though Andrew rather doubted it.

When he had turned a corner and was out of sight, Simon said, “Come, let us see to lodging first, and then eat. It is too late to meet Amos tonight, and he is not expecting us until the morrow in any case.”

“Do you think that John will actually become a rabbi?” asked Andrew pensively.

“I know not. I am sure that he will do well at whatever he puts his mind to; he is a superb young man. But the question is whether this is what is really calling him, or whether there is some other profession that would suit him better. He certainly does love to read, Zebedee told me.” He said this a little complacently. Andrew, looking at Simon, thought that perhaps he too should learn to read—but then, why bother? It seemed a hard chore, and there was no need for both of them to have the skill.

“He seems fascinated by this John namesake of his,” he remarked. You know, when he went to see Mary, I got the impression that she discussed him with him, and advised him to see him. He is—or at least was—very worried about some-

thing.”

“You do know that he was a great friend of Samuel, the twin who was killed?”

Andrew looked at Simon. “Ah, yes? I suspected as much. His reaction was much greater than just hearing that there was an accident.”

“Zebedee told me that they had become fast friends.”

“And now that you mention it, somebody also told me that Thomas, his twin, was a secret drunk, and that that probably had something to do with the accident. Poor Thomas! Apparently he had tried to hide what he was doing, and all the world knew about it.”

Simon stopped and looked back over at Andrew. “But you do not mean that Thomas *killed* Samuel!”

“Oh, no. Not at all. The one I was talking to seemed to think that they may have had a dispute about his vice, and—you know how it is—they were not paying attention to the fact that they were in a small boat, and it upset, and apparently hit Samuel on the head, and he died before Thomas could rescue him.”

“It must have been something like that. Poor Malachi!”

“Poor everyone, including John! He looked almost as if for some reason he felt responsible.”

Simon resumed waling slowly, musing. “No wonder Malachi wanted no help, once he found the two of them. I had heard that he disowned Thomas; I did not believe it, but perhaps he did, and that was why. To have two sons, and then none, even though one was still alive—if one can call it ‘alive,’ if he is off by himself probably drinking himself to death. That is what I would do, if my drinking somehow caused my

brother's death!" He shook his head in sorrow.

"It is sad. Sad. . . ." Andrew thought of John. Even if he were not somehow involved in the death, to have the friend you loved die so tragically, and to have the one left look exactly like him (he had seen the two together once, and wondered how anyone could distinguish them) be not only a drunk, but the one who, deliberately or not, brought about the death! He looked up, to try to put it out of his mind, and said, "But is not this where we are to lodge?"

"Let us assure ourselves that they have room for us, and then we can go down that street there, where there is a place where they tell me they have edible food for not a great deal."

They went in and haggled over the price of a room, and finally after about half an hour, brought the owner down to a price they thought they could afford. Simon did most of the talking, which, Andrew realized, was fortunate, since Andrew would have given up in exasperation in half the time, and spent twice as much. As it was, they probably spent more than they had to, and it galled Andrew to think thus, but it was perhaps a reasonable price, considering that they were in the center of Jerusalem, and close to where they would be meeting the lawyers.

He hated the city for this reason; as soon as they opened their mouths, everyone recognized from their accent that they were from Galilee—and they no doubt smelt of fish, which would give everyone here the impression that they were ignorant clods, to be taken advantage of. It was well that Simon was so persistent. He had named as his price what he would have paid for a comparable room (actually a rather larger one) in Bethsaida or Capernaum, and when the owner simply

laughed, he said, “Do you want to take it, or shall we go elsewhere?”

“You will find nothing ‘elsewhere’ at anything near that price, unless you go back to Galilee!” said the owner.

“Well, if it comes to that, we can always go out of this cesspool of a city, and pay nothing.”

“And find yourselves stripped of everything in the morning, including your clothes.”

“We have no guarantee, you know, that that will not happen here.”

“This is a respectable house!”

“Words! Words! You have heard our offer.”

“But that is ridiculous! Absurd!” But he quoted a price that was lower than what he first mentioned.

Simon kept offering the same price, and the owner kept scoffing—but he also, by little and little, lowered what he required. Eventually, Simon just stood there, making ready to turn away, and as soon as he moved, the man came down a bit more, and finally began with, “Behold, I cannot charge less, or I will be losing money.” And he named a price, at which Simon shook his head.

After several of these bits of verbal swordplay, Simon took Andrew by the shoulder and actually turned him around and began to walk out, at which the owner said, “Very well, I will rent you the room at a loss, because it is better to have someone there than an empty room!”

This happened a couple of times before Simon (who was walking out slowly) looked back and said, “Very well,” and they agreed on the price, and left to eat.

On the way, Andrew said, “Where did you learn how to

do that?”

“Oh, I used to watch Father haggle over the price of fish, and the women over food, and study how the successful ones managed it. I knew I would have to learn the skill somehow. It is all in how long one can tolerate arguing and being called names. We probably could have talked him down several shekels more, but I was growing tired of it all.”

“I am glad it was you doing it; I would have given in long ago; it is like trying to walk through a swarm of mosquitoes.”

“I suspect that what we are going to find will be more like being in the middle of a swarm of bees. So we had best eat and then get as much rest as possible.”

So they ate, rather well, Andrew thought, though it cost a startling amount when all was said and done. Simon remarked afterward that perhaps they should find a more reasonable place next time, “though they know how to cook here; but we are not here to stuff our stomachs!” He rubbed his as he spoke.

The next few days saw them meeting with the lawyers, who raised difficulties and contingencies neither of them had thought of, and which neither of them could foresee in his wildest nightmares, and proposed solutions (always expensive) that involved convoluted agreements between the two parties that no one could understand.

But Simon put on his haggling-cap, and simply told them that he understood Aramaic and not Legality, “or whatever it is that you are spouting,” and if they did not have the documents in a language he could understand, with meanings that were obvious to simple fishermen, he would have none of them. They objected, of course, that matters were not so

simple as all that, and he answered that of course they were if one made an effort to *make* them simple instead of using one's wits to twist things into knots. All they wanted was (and so on). And they tried to explain that in order to do this and be safe about it they had to (and so on), and he said, "Well, then, you can explain to me in good Aramaic why it *must* be done and what happens if it is *not* done, and why it must be done in *this* way rather than that, and what happens if it is not done in this way, and I might—I *might* listen to you."

Andrew was lost in admiration, when he was not lost in a mass of verbiage. After two days of this, he realized that his head was about to explode, though Simon seemed to be enjoying himself at harassing the lawyers (who were having as much fun sparring with him as he was); and so Andrew excused himself, and went for a walk.

"Amazing!" he thought. "Who would have thought that Simon would have it in him! And his patience! Of course, he obviously delights in it. It absolutely infuriates me! One must be fair; Simon is much better at this sort of thing than I could ever be." The thought surprised him, since he was so convinced that he was better than Simon in every possible way. "But one must be fair," he repeated to himself, with some complacency, thinking that he was, after all, seeking justice and was not simply being envious. It made him feel quite virtuous.

He was surprised, as he walked along musing, to find that the city was almost as crowded as for the festival, and the people just as rudely shoved him aside in their hurry to get nowhere. "And they consider *us* boors!" he thought to himself, resisting the temptation to dig his elbow into the man who had bumped into his side. He had his hand on his money-pouch

inside his tunic, since many of the bumpers had an ulterior motive for jostling him, as he had once or twice discovered at a festival. Now nothing could induce him to let go of his hold on his valuables.

Of course, as soon as he realized that he was sightseeing, he asked where the High Priest's palace was, and found it near the Temple—which made sense, he thought, if the High Priest had to serve there often. He was awestruck when he looked at the building.

“To think that John is in *there* somewhere!” he said. He would not dare even to approach the threshold and John was actually inside, doubtless studying and poring over manuscripts—or whatever one did with other students—and discussing the meaning of the Books parts of which were read on Sabbaths in the Synagogue. “Well, I suppose we have lost him,” he said to one of the ornate windows, which was actually covered with some kind of transparent stone with a slightly blue tint. He asked someone who was passing by and not in the usual tremendous hurry what it was, and was told “alabaster,” which left him as much in the dark as he had been before he asked.

“Once introduced here,” he said to himself afterwards, “he would never condescend to return to our simple way of life!”

In a way, he was happy for John, but realized how much he would miss him—and even more, his admiring glances. He had not realized how much he had fed off John's looking up to him as a kind of paragon of what he wanted to be. And now he had soared far, far beyond that, and would look down on him and all the rest of the lowly fishermen from his lofty

height, and even might come into the synagogue at Capernaum or Nazareth some day to explain to the ordinary people the mysteries of the Torah, reading from that immense scroll they had as if it were just a matter of course.

Andrew had intended to be exhilarated by seeing where John was, and he found himself depressed in the extreme, because of missing John, but, interestingly, he realized, not least because Simon was obviously so much better than he at these negotiations that simply infuriated him. Several times he had wanted to slam his hand down on the table hard enough to break it (and probably would have done, and broken his hand to boot), but Simon simply kept at it, wearing them down as water wore away at a rock.

Well, but he had best go back and at least pretend to join in the discussions that he increasingly could not follow and cared nothing about following. When it was all over, Simon would read the results to him, “and it will be in Aramaic” he said to himself, and presumably then he would understand it and be able to agree—and to explain to Zebedee and his own father, who would have to sign the documents.

FOUR

The discussions were for practical purposes finished (which apparently meant that they had at least one day more to wrap things up), and so was the week. They went into the agreed-on corner of the Temple, and Andrew wondered whether John would even be there, or whether he had become so engrossed in what he was doing that he forgot all about it. But no—he would come that afternoon, since he had promised, and was not a person to forget a promise. And it was possible that he did not like the life—Andrew hoped. He could not believe that Annas would find him wanting, but what did he know? He was just a fisherman. His experience with the lawyers made pellucid what “just a fisherman” meant, though they *did* have a certain grudging, if condescending, respect for Simon. Andrew tried to feel happy about that. Justice, after all.

In any case, when they arrived at the meeting place, Andrew found that his heart was beating rather faster than usual, as he began looking out for John. “Behold him!” said Simon, pointing to a lad who had broken into a run. He was

almost upon them when Andrew looked up, and opened his arms, into which John flew, and they embraced. It was good to feel him there, and especially good that he felt glad to be there. "It is a joy to see you, youngster!" exclaimed Andrew and Simon together, and John answered, "You have no idea how happy I am to behold both of you!" and all laughed from sheer joy, Simon embracing him also and then holding him at arm's length, and looking into his face.

"So the scholar has not forgotten his old friends," said Andrew. "You smell of—what?"

John laughed. "Soap. They had me bathe and wash my clothes as soon as I entered the house." Andrew wondered for a moment whether he and Simon still smelt of fish. "But how could I forget you?" John was saying. Andrew speculated that it would be quite simple, once he had accustomed himself to the High Priest's palace and all the luxury that was doubtless inside.

"Oh, I suspect it will be quite easy as the years go on," he said. "I saw the palace. But you will at least be spending a month with us, is it not?"

"Probably a good deal more than that."

"Oh? You found the life not to your liking? You miss not living in a palace, and rowing a boat and smelling of fish?"

John became serious. "Make no jokes about it, Andrew. It is a good life, and one which in many respects I love dearly. And when I met you, I realized I actually *like* the smell of fish." So they *did* still smell of fish. Andrew began to be a bit self-conscious about it, and then said to himself, "Well, what of it? I *am* a fisherman, after all!"

They all laughed, in a slightly embarrassed way. "No,

but,” said Simon, “you do not think you were intended to be a rabbi? Or was it—” He realized that it would be indelicate to suggest that the school did not consider him qualified.

John caught what he was driving at, and laughed again. “Oh, they would—probably—accept me if I decided to return. At least, provisionally, for a year or two; but if I *did* decide to return, I think I could make it permanent; it is not all that difficult.”

“But you rather think,” said Andrew, hopefully, “that you will not do so.”

“At the moment at least,” answered John. “There is much there to like, but there is something—” he did not know how to finish the sentence.

“Something not what you expected,” said Andrew, doing it for him.

“Let us leave it at that. I must think about it. There is also the fact that it will cost my father a good deal of money.”

“Indeed?” said both of them in surprise.

“Oh, yes. When one thinks of it, of course it is expensive to keep and educate a person; it simply did not occur to me, and I was—I almost knew not what to say—when Annas mentioned it to me as a matter of course. It is *not* inexpensive.”

“Do you think your father can afford it? I realize, he is doing well, but we *are* but fishermen, after all.”

“I looked at the fee, and I *think* he could manage it rather easily. I know not, but I *think* so. Still, it is a consideration. If it is really the life for me, then it is probably worth it, and I can pay him back when I finish; I gather that students of Annas do rather well after they graduate. Some of the ones in their last year have mentioned their prospects, in order to tempt me to

stay, I think. But if it is merely something I *can* do, then it seems to me that the remuneration should not be something I should take into account. Why make my father pay for a career that I find not really—not really *mine*, if you know what I am saying.”

“Then you prefer fishing to rabbizing?” asked Andrew.

“I know not. I think that fishing is perhaps not my life either; but the problem is that I know not what is. But if I am going to do something that does not completely suit me, then at the moment at least, my inclination is to go back to fishing rather than to ‘rabbize,’ as you say.”

“Well, we will certainly welcome you, whether or not your whole heart is in it,” said Simon, and Andrew nodded enthusiastic assent, “especially now that we are definitely a team with Zebedee.”

“Oh, then whatever it was you were doing was successful?”

“As far as one can call anything that lawyers do ‘successful,’ said Andrew sardonically. “Thank God for Simon! Many a time I was ready to smash the table with my fist, but he simply went calmly on, asking them to explain themselves, after which they turned sentences into tighter and tighter knots, more tangled than a net that had caught a shark.” John looked at him, a bit surprised, perhaps that he would be praising Simon. Was he *that* obvious? He looked away, not to show his reddening face. And anyhow, justice *was* justice.

“They knew—or at least” said Simon, “they thought—that they could out-talk us, and at first made a game of it. But I decided that I was not going to let them make us frantic, and I simply went on and on until they condescended to spell out

what they meant in Aramaic that meant something, and I would not let them go until they got it clear. I mean, the whole thing was simple enough, really; but they wanted to make it a maze of whereases and therefore and so on, and I—who was it that the Greeks said gave somebody a thread to carry into a maze so he could get out?”

Neither John nor Andrew had any idea what he was talking about.

“It matters not. I made them spell out in simple terms what they were saying—and it was amusing to see the difficulty they had in doing so—”

Amusing. It was infuriating!” said Andrew.

“That was because you let them have the upper hand,” remarked Simon. “I knew that we were the ones finally in control. We knew what we wanted, and we knew we could do it without any legal agreement if we chose, and so, in spite of the fact that they kept telling us we could not, when all was said and done, we had them put the whole thing into legal language that we could understand. Zebedee will have no problem.”

“And all was said and done,” said Andrew, “only yesterday! But we are free of them! We have the documents! Zebedee needs only to make his mark upon them.”

“Well, I am glad that you were successful.” said John.

“But let us pay our respects to the Master,” said Simon, “and then we can return to where we are staying.” They suited the action to the words, after which Simon said, “There is room for you, of course, if you do not mind sleeping on a mat on the floor.”

“Of course not.”

“No doubt it will seem primitive,” said Andrew, “after the

luxury you experienced in the High Priest's palace. I saw the outside of it, as I said, three days ago, when I could not tolerate another moment of those discussions."

"A good deal of the palace is quite luxurious, to be sure," answered John, "but not my room." He laughed. "Not by any means! Students are even lower there than servants." The others raised their eyebrows, and John went on, "Not that we were abused; but our comfort was not uppermost in the minds of the establishment. I have no complaint, really."

Andrew noticed that John was surprised at the crowds in the street even in an ordinary day, just as he had been. How it must be to live in a city like this, and be always frantic, rushing from one place to the next! But the wonderful thing to Andrew was how happy John seemed to be to see them—and especially him. He loved him like a brother—and thinking of Simon, he felt it was more like a son. He put his arm on his shoulder as he had been used to do after fishing, and noticed that John seemed to warm to it. It was good to have friends!

They lapsed for a time into contented silence as they walked along, and finally arrived at the modest accommodations the two had selected. Andrew hoped that John would not be too disappointed; it was distinctly a barren room, now that he looked at it with fresh eyes. Well, they were *not* rich, and in a visit such as this, it was wise to save all the money they could. Andrew noticed John take in a breath that was almost a sigh; he was having a bit of trouble adjusting to reality, it seemed.

They went out and sat outside a shop that had what Andrew called, "fairly decent food" and ate the evening meal and drank the rather sour wine, which John mixed with a good

deal more water than usual. Andrew watched with amusement. The students had probably been eating well, he speculated.

“We could leave on the morrow,” said Andrew as they were eating, “but I thought I would like to see this John we spoke of, as long as we are down here. Do you remember?” As if he would forget!

“Of course I remember! How could I forget a prophet named John?”

“Of a certainty! He would be a rival, I suspect. So we are to have two prophets named John, then.”

At this, John reddened, and Andrew exclaimed, “Oho! *Now* we know why you went to that school! But you found they were not a training-ground for prophets!” and he gave John a playful punch in the shoulder.

John was silent. He *had* hit a nerve, it seemed. John a prophet! Well, why not? David, after all, was but a shepherd. Finally, John said, “But seriously, I would like to hear what he has to say myself.” He looked thoughtful, as though remembering something. But since he did not see fit to explain himself, Andrew let it drop, and they went back to the room to bed.

The next day, they journeyed to the place by the Jordan where it was said that John was bathing the people. And as they neared it, it was hard to miss where it was, because quite a crowd was around him, and his booming voice, aided by the water of the river, carried far.

He was clearly a hermit, dressed in skins, with his hair long, like a Nazirite. He was rather remarkably clean for a hermit, however, presumably because periodically he would go down into the water (he preached on a beach at the shore)

with a number of people, each of whom he would immerse in the water, telling them he was washing off their sins and killing their past life; and they would wade back and let the sun dry them off.

Andrew was a bit startled, if not intimidated, by how outspoken he was. He took one look, for instance, at the wide fringes adorning the squarish mantles of some of the audience (a common practice among Pharisees, a very strict sect), pointed to them and shouted, “You vipers’ spawn! Who told you you could escape from the retribution coming upon you? Show results that demonstrate a change of heart, and do not start telling yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father.’ I tell you that God can make these stones bear children to Abraham! No, an axe is now at the roots of the tree, and every tree that does not bear good fruit is going to be chopped down and thrown into the fire to burn!”

“He definitely does not mince words!” whispered Andrew to John. “And If even they are being condemned, what chance have the rest of us?” But John was voicing—granted in a overstated way—something that appeared to have occurred to John also, based on his reaction. His look indicated that a discovery of some sort he had made had just been confirmed. Andrew wondered what it was, exactly.

Nothing particular happened at that time. Andrew was half expecting there would be a confrontation, with the Pharisees denouncing him in turn, but they just turned away—at least for this particular encounter. Perhaps they had expected to be praised for being there and asked to second what John had been saying, and were too taken aback by his fulminations against them. At any rate, nothing happened.

Then some people with worried looks came up to John and asked him, “Rabbi, what are we to do?”

“If you have two tunics, give one to someone who has none; if you have extra food, do the same.”

A tax-collector came up to be bathed and said, “And what should I do?” and John answered, “Do not demand more than you were told to collect.” The man looked at him, astonished, and said, “Then I should starve?” and walked away.

There were even some soldiers who had misgivings about their conduct and approached John to be bathed. When they asked him what to do, he said, “Do not bully people or arrest them on false charges—and be satisfied with your salary.” One or two thought this something of a hard saying, but decided to be bathed anyway. When they emerged, they seemed relieved.

Andrew wondered whether he would have to reveal his faults and sins, and doubted whether he could do so. He knew it was really wrong of him to resent Simon as he did, but he could not help it. But how could he explain himself (justify himself?) publicly to this John, in the presence of Simon and John, so that he could go and have the sin, if there was one, washed away? He began to think he did not dare.

And then he looked over at John as he stood beside him, and realized that he was not alone. John had an extremely worried look also; he glanced back at Andrew and saw him looking at him, and turned away, his face scarlet with embarrassment. What was *that* all about?

So evidently both of them had secrets, and both just stood there, irresolute. Simon did not look all that eager to be bathed either.

As they were hesitating, some of the of the Pharisees

returned, and apparently decided to confront John to his face. “Are you claiming to be the Prince?” they asked. “The Messiah who was prophesied, the descendant of David?”

“I?” said John. “No. But there *is* someone coming after me—who is ahead of me, because he was in existence before me. And we have all received something of what in him is complete. We have been blessed with gifts that are his by right. The law may have been given by Moses, but God’s blessings and truth have come into being through him. No one has ever seen God, but the God God fathered, who is in the father’s bosom, has made him known. I? Who am I?”

“Who *are* you? Are you Elijah? You sound as if that is the one you claim to be.”

“I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet who was prophesied?”

“No.”

“Then who are you? We have to give some answer to those who sent us. Just who do you claim to be?”

“I,” said John, looking at them and addressing not only them but all the assembled people, “am a voice crying in the desert, ‘Smooth out the path for the Master,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

“But then why are you bathing people, if you are not the Prince or Elijah or the prophet?”

“I am bathing you in water,” said John. “But there is someone standing among you—someone you do not recognize; someone whose sandal-straps I am not good enough to untie! He will bathe you in the Holy Spirit—and in fire!”

At this point, the delegation gave up and turned away in disgust. And John called after them, “And he has his

winnowing-fan in his hand to thresh out the grain off the granary floor, and he will store the wheat in his barn and burn the chaff in fire that will never go out!” But what he said was lost on them; they soon were out of earshot.

Some other people then came up to be bathed, and Andrew noticed that they did not have to confess their sins publicly. He looked over at John, who evidently saw the same thing, and made as if to go forward.

But at that moment, a lone man came up, with his back to them, so that they could not see him clearly. For some reason, there suddenly was no one around him. John (the Bather) seemed to know who he was. He looked at him, and almost whispered, “I should be being bathed by you, and you are coming to *me*?”

“Allow it for now,” said the man softly—he turned slightly, and Andrew saw that it was someone John recognized with astonishment. “This is what must be done,” the man went on, to the Bather, “not to leave out anything proper.” So the Bather, with some reluctance, went into the Jordan with him, put his hand on his head, and immersed him in the water, and drew back.

Suddenly, something happened in the sky above; it was as if it opened up, somehow, as a cloud sometimes breaks up, but there was no cloud there. It was as if the sky itself was a cloud, and one could see a brightness behind it. A bird—a dove—came out and lighted on the man as he emerged from the water, and an enormous thunderclap seemed to say, “This is my beloved Son; I am pleased with him.” Andrew’s hair stood on his head.

“Did you hear that?” he said.

“What?” said Simon.

“Those were words, were they not?”

“I heard thunder,” he answered.

“No, they were words. I heard them.” He looked over at John.

“I did also,” said John. “Or something like words.”

“What did they say?” asked Simon.

“Something like, “This is my son, the one I love; I am pleased with him.”

“That was what I thought I heard also,” said Andrew.

“Or, if not exactly that, words to that effect.”

“I did notice that the thunder was—meaningful, somehow,” said Simon. “Whatever that means.”

“I think we should leave,” said John. “I must think about this.” He was obviously shaken to his core not only by the thunder and its words, but by whoever it was who had been bathed. He *did* look a bit familiar to Andrew, and, come to think of it, he seemed to sound like a Galilean also. Was it someone John knew well?

He looked at this person, who was strong, as if he worked with his hands, and quite good-looking (the dove, of course, had flown away) and then saw an extremely handsome man, with fringes to his mantle that made him look like a Pharisee, come up to this person and speak briefly. (The bather had drifted away.) The drying man greeted him and answered whatever question he had, and evidently dismissed him; then the two walked away in different directions.

John now was clearly restless, nervously anxious to go somewhere by himself where he could digest what had happened; and so they went home in silence, until Andrew

said, "You know, I thought I recognized him from somewhere."

"Who?" said Simon.

"The one the bird lighted on," he answered. "I could swear I have seen him before."

"It was Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter," said John.

"You are right!"

"He built my boat, the little one, when I was but a boy. You remember; the one now beside our house."

"Of course!" said Andrew. "How could I have forgotten?"

"But then what does all this mean?" said Simon.

"I know not," answered John. "But it is something vitally important, I am certain. I must think!"

Andrew now wanted his own solitude to ponder this. It looked very much as if this Jesus—a carpenter, of all people, and from Nazareth, of all places!—was the one John, the Bather, was referring to as the one who was to come after him, and whose sandals he was not fit to untie! A carpenter! But there was no question that the thunder was referring to him, and the bird seemed to be a sign that it was he and he alone.

Five

Well, why not? David began as a shepherd,” Andrew thought, “and—who was it?—was a ‘dresser of sycamores,’ whatever that means, and even Isaiah was no one until the angel came down and touched his lips with a coal.”

But on the other hand, was this Jesus a descendant of David? He would have to be to be the Prince that was prophesied, who was, after all, a son of David. But again, why not? Descendants of David were scattered all through the Judeans, even those there in Galilee.

Simon had apparently also been struck out of his usual volubility—or had enough sense to see that his two companions needed to think by themselves. He himself did not seem so overwhelmed, but perhaps as a courtesy walked up and down the room, pondering, while Andrew and John sat in opposite corners (Andrew every now and then looking up at John, who had plunged into the depths of meditation. There was something special there. After all, was it not Jesus’s mother that he had visited before they came here? And had she told

him that he would find Jesus here? Did he know that Jesus was more than just a carpenter, or was he as completely astounded as Andrew was by discovering him referred to by thunder as his Son? Whatever that meant.

What *could* it have meant?

“This is my beloved Son; I am pleased with him,” the thunder had said—but not in simple Aramaic words; it was though the sounds were images of thoughts or something. One understood them, but as if by being reminded of what they meant.

How incredible! But if thunder were to speak, why would it speak in words? It would be the voice of the One Whose Name We Must Not Pronounce, and would speak directly to one’s mind, would it not? Just as it seemed to do. The thunder was just a way of calling attention to the Master who was saying it—which was doubtless why Simon did not hear it—though he said he heard it as “meaningful,” though he did not catch what the meaning was. He was too tied down to the literal, so what he heard was thunder, even though he felt that it was more than that.

Perhaps.

Andrew felt a burst of pride that he understood the meaning—if indeed, the meaning was what John understood. It was *something* meaningful, and it had to do with Jesus. But how could Jesus be the Son of thunder—or rather of the one who made the thunder? The Master was not some Zeus, the Thunder-God; the Master controlled absolutely everything, and thunder and lightning were just manifestations of his power—and if he was omnipotent, feeble ones at that, for all their force.

Thunder itself, after all, was just a sound, however loud and forceful it might be. It was the sound of lightning, which *was* power, but nothing in comparison with the Creator of not only lightning but everything else. Think of earthquakes, volcanoes. . . .

But that meant that Jesus, the carpenter, was the Son of the Almighty, the Creator of everything! How could it be?

Yet Jesus was the son of Joseph. Everyone knew that. Still, the thunder obviously did not think so. Then who *was* this man? The thunder could not have lied.

Or rather *what* was he? And were John and Andrew, and one supposes Simon, supposed to have some special relation with him, since they had heard what the thunder said? John seemed to think so, since Mary seemed somehow to have prepared him for this shock. John seemed to know that *something* connected with Jesus was going to come out of this meeting with John, but he clearly was not expecting what actually happened.

. . . Of course, if Jesus was actually the Son of the Almighty, and only *apparently* the son of Joseph—how ridiculous it all was! But the thunder *did* speak; Andrew could not doubt it—then probably he had only been waiting for the crucial time—when the Bather, acting like Elijah returning, as he was supposed to—

But no. He said he was not Elijah. But he was doing what Elijah was supposed to do if Jesus was the Prince. Perhaps he was John in body and Elijah in mission or spirit. He certainly was announcing that the day of rescue was coming!—but that meant that the Prince everyone had been waiting for for centuries was actually here, in the guise of a simple carpenter!

But in that case, he would have to do a great deal to prove that he was the Prince. Andrew could picture his relatives and friends in Nazareth saying, “Who, *he*? I knew him as a child. A bright lad, but the Son of the Almighty? And who, then, is Joseph?” And of course anyone else would say, “Why would the Son of the Almighty come from Nazareth? Was he not supposed to hail from Bethlehem, David’s city? Was there not even a prophesy to that effect?” Andrew seemed to have recalled something, and certainly whenever there was speculation, at least, it was that he would come from Bethlehem.

Of course, what was Bethlehem? It was to Judea what Nazareth was to Galilee—nowhere—with the single exception of David, who himself was no one until Samuel anointed him.

. . . The Master evidently had his own ideas about how things were to be done.

But that meant that John and Andrew and—and even Simon—were perhaps about to become part of his entourage. Why else scare them out of their tunics with birds lighting on a person while the thunder spoke?

Well, if there were anything to this, it would advance itself on the morrow. Today this Jesus had not acted as if they were even there. The only one he paid any attention to was that Pharisee or whoever he was, and walked away as if that was what he had come for. But then why had John and Andrew heard the thunder speak? No, no, he must have wanted them to think and return. That had to be it.

Of course he would go back on the morrow. He saw that John also was becoming restless, as if he was afraid that he should have followed Jesus this day. But he had more or less

vanished, did he not? He certainly gave no sign that he wanted them to follow him. Perhaps he wanted them to have time to digest what they had seen before they acted on it.

Just then a slave from the lawyers Simon and Andrew had been consulting knocked and came into the room and said something to Simon. Simon said to Andrew, "We—or at least one of us—must go back to these people. They have found another snag which must be resolved."

Andrew answered, "But surely you will return to the Jordan tomorrow. We must discover what all this means!"

"You go, with John," said Simon. "A complication has arisen—of course, how else could those people behave?—and I must see to it before we return home. I will take care of it—it is nothing serious—and either meet you or be here so that you can tell me what has happened."

Andrew protested, and they discussed the matter for a while, but finally assented. He came over to John, and said, "I assume you plan to go back to the Jordan tomorrow," and when John said, "You could not keep me away!" he went on, "It turns out that Simon will have to see to some legal detail, which we hope will not take long, but he wants us to go as early as possible, and will either join us, or I can come back and fetch him if necessary."

"Lawyers!" said Simon. "They are like colds; they *will* appear at the most inconvenient moments! But fear not; I am certain it can all be resolved easily. It is a nuisance, nothing more, but one at least one of us cannot avoid."

Andrew, truth be told, was not that unhappy that it would only be he and John who would go back to investigate Jesus—if, of course, Jesus appeared again to be "investigated."

And it seemed as if John also was secretly rather pleased that he and Andrew would be alone together when they met Jesus—as he appeared certain they would.

So the next day, they arrived back at the Jordan quite early; but nothing unusual happened until nearly nightfall. John was bathing the people, (both John and Andrew had themselves bathed), and giving his speech about changing one's way of thinking, because the world was going to be a different sort of place soon.

Then, however, as the sun was setting, Jesus appeared again, and John said, pointing to him, "There is God's lamb, the one who is ridding the world of its sin! He is the one I was speaking of when I said that there was a man coming after me who was ahead of me because he existed before me. And even I was not sure who he was, though I came to bathe you in water to reveal him to Israel."

But then the Bather looked around at everyone (Jesus had gone by by this time, and John was about to go after him, when he realized he did not know where he was), and said, "I saw the Spirit coming down out of the sky like a dove and lighting on him. It was not that I recognized him myself; the one who sent me to bathe the people told me that when I saw the Spirit come down and rest on someone, he would be the one who was to bathe people in the Holy Spirit. And I saw this, and now I can swear that he is the Son of God!"

So, thought Andrew, I was right. John is now confirming that he is the Son of the Almighty himself! Then who is Joseph?

"Rabbi," said John, going up to him. "do you think that he would like others to follow him?"

“Come back tomorrow, and if you see him, your question can probably be answered.”

“Perhaps we should be following you.”

“Me? Why would you follow the bridegroom’s servant when the groom himself is there? No. He will have to grow greater, and I grow less now. You will see. Come back tomorrow.”

This was peculiar, thought Andrew. Jesus seemed to be showing himself to them piecemeal, so to speak, teasing them, as if playing some kind of joke on them to see if they would come back a third time, or would give up any idea of being a follower of his. At any rate, since Jesus was not there today, the two went back to their room, where they met Simon, fuming. “All day they kept me!” he raged. “Over nothing! And it is not finished *yet!* These men can find complications in—in a cup of clear water! I must go back tomorrow! What happened there today?”

The others told him and he exclaimed, “Jesus of Nazareth! Who would have thought it? I think I even met him myself once! It *was* truly he?”

“Without a doubt,” said John. “I know him well.”

“Amazing! Well, let me know what happens. I should be through by mid-morning.”

That night was haunted with “and now I can swear that he is the Son of God!” The Son of God! What could that mean? And had John not said, “The God God fathered, who is in the Father’s bosom?” What could *that* mean? The *God* God fathered! And even the thunder confirmed it: “My beloved Son.” Incredible! Impossible!

The beginning of the next day promised to be a repetition

of the previous one, except that John as he bathed the people had his eye on Andrew and John, who were close beside him, and was obviously watching out for Jesus. As afternoon drew on, Jesus walked by, as if musing on something, paying no attention to John and the ones around him, and the Bather said to Andrew, “That man is God’s lamb,” clearly indicating that they were to go after him.

This was a new development, thought Andrew. “God’s *lamb*?” And then he realized that it was not new. Had not John said, He remembered from the day before, “There is God’s lamb; the one who is ridding the world of its sin.” It must refer somehow to the Passover lamb. But what was *that* all about? Ridding the world of its sin? Was that what the mission of the Prince was to be? Could he rid *Andrew* of any sin that he might have in resenting Simon—and could he establish true justice on earth? Why not, if he was the “God God fathered,” whatever that might mean?

As they followed after him, Jesus gave no sign that he had noticed them, until they were away from the crowd, and then he turned, smiled in recognition at John, and said, “What is it you are looking for?”

“Rabbi,” said John, turning red, wondering if that was the title he should give, and evidently at a loss to explain just what he *was* looking for, “Where—where are you staying?” Andrew was overjoyed that he did not have to say anything; he was even more confused than John seemed to be.

Jesus gave a little chuckle, and said, “Come and see.” They followed him to a room not unlike theirs, and he said, with no preamble, “Would you be interested in becoming a part of changing the whole world?”

It was a request to laugh at, except for the fact that the thunder had spoken. The two were astounded, and Jesus said, “You saw what happened the day before yesterday, did you not?” They nodded, rather sheepishly. “It is time—or almost time—for me to put away my, shall we say my disguise, and introduce myself to the world—gradually, gradually. If people accept me, the world will be a very, very different place—and certain people”—he gave a look at John and Andrew in turn—“will understand themselves better and will eventually be able to be at peace. That is what you wish, is it not?” The two nodded. “Among other things, I realize,” he added.

He looked at them, as if to ask for comments. Andrew was completely tongue-tied, and even John seemed not to dare to speak to this person, who clearly was at the very least a prophet like Elijah, and whom the thunder had called “his beloved Son.” Jesus laughed at their consternation, and said, “Come now. I am still who I was. What I am now is what I was then; it is just that you know a bit more about me than before. But you were not terrified of me,” he said, looking at John with amusement, “when I put the ‘John board’ in your boat and told you to be sure to step on it. Why should you be terrified now?”

Andrew could understand very well how John would think he had very good reason to be terrified now that he realized he had been dealing with some kind of supernatural being—with *the* supernatural Being, in fact, somehow or other. He finally managed to blurt, “You want *us* to join you in changing the world? We are but fishermen!”

“Ah, but you will be doing what no human being can do, fisherman or king. You will see. What Elijah did was nothing

to what you will do as a matter of course. Had you no desire to be a prophet?"

"He does indeed!" exclaimed Andrew. "He all but told us two days ago!"

"I did not!" said John, scarlet with embarrassment.

Andrew said, "He told us that—you know he spent a week with the school at the High Priest's palace, to see if he wanted to be a rabbi, and he came back two days ago, dissatisfied, and when I mentioned John—the one who was bathing the people—as being a prophet in competition with him because of the name, he acted as if I had read his thoughts!" Andrew was babbling, and suddenly in embarrassment shut off his voice as if it had been a box he closed.

"He actually *told* Daniel of his ambition, you know," said Jesus. John's head snapped around to look in astonishment at Jesus. Andrew, of course, was totally mystified at who this "Daniel" was. "And Daniel said," he went on "The Master knows what he is doing, and unless I miss my guess, he has some sort of plan for you; and doubtless this stay with us is part of the preparation he is giving you. He does nothing in vain. I expect some day to be able to say to my friends, "Oh yes, I once knew the great John, and even gave him a little advice and encouragement!" He does indeed know what he is doing, and Daniel did not miss his guess; he himself was something of a prophet there."

John gaped at him openmouthed. Andrew saw how dumbfounded he was that Jesus knew of a conversation he could not possibly have overheard. Perhaps he *was* the Creator of the universe, and *did* know everything! How astounding!

Andrew then exclaimed, 'I must fetch Simon!' and

dashed off, leaving John and Jesus alone together.

He had a suspicion that Jesus and John had a good deal to say to each other, things that he was not to be privy to. It looked as if John was going to have a special mission among the rather unpromising followers that were beginning to be collected, and Jesus would have to be grooming him rather a great deal.

But Andrew suddenly realized that if he were to be taking part in changing the world into—what? Perhaps restoring things to the way they were before Adam sinned. Would not *that* be the miracle of miracles! But why not, if he was the Creator. Could he not be the re-Creator?

And use his followers as agents, and perhaps give them even supernatural powers?

Six

AND WAS THERE NOT THAT PROPHECY—of Isaiah, was it?—that talked about a new world where lions ate hay and children played with poisonous snakes? Something to that effect. Was it just poetry, or was it what would really happen when true justice was established on the earth?

And it might—it just *might*—actually happen! And Andrew and Simon and John might be movers of it!

No, it was absurd.

But the thunder had spoken, and Jesus seemed to know what had happened to John, even though he had no opportunity of finding it out.

Andrew felt like running and leaping, as he threaded his way among all the rushing Judeans toward Simon. He went to the room where the lawyers had been discussing their problem, and was told, “He just now left. He said if you came looking for him, he would be at his room, since he had the final papers and wanted to put them safely away.”

“Then it is really over?”

The man grinned. “I think we can say so. It is all now in

‘simple Aramaic’ that is nevertheless as tight as it ought to be.”

“If I may say so, this is a miracle surpassing the crossing of the Red Sea.”

The man laughed. “Given the persistence of your brother and the difficulties he raised with our perfectly clear ‘complications,’ as he called them, you might not be far from wrong.”

“Well, we are grateful for what you have done. Peace.”

“Peace, my friend. I hope we have not disrupted yours too much.” He closed the door quietly, still wearing an amused grin.

Andrew then hurried over to the room, and found Simon carefully inserting the papers into his backpack. “We have found the Prince!” he exclaimed to Simon.

“So you think he really is this Son of Thunder?”

“It seems to me that there is no question about it. He started talking to us, and was reminding John of some conversation he had with a person named Daniel, and John was dumbstruck at how he could have known. He simply seemed to take it as a matter of course. He asked us if we wanted to be a part of changing the whole world. And he looked as if he meant it! And not only that, he looked as if he could *do* it! As if *we* could do it!

“What did he mean, ‘changing the whole world?’”

“Well, he did not say, but I suspect he meant restoring it to the condition it was in before Adam’s sin ruined it.”

“Oh, come now! You mean with no death, and—and no sickness, and all that?”

“Well, why not, if he is really the Son of the Almighty? Which must mean that he *is* the Almighty, wearing human

skin. I mean, the Master is not someone like Jupiter.”

“I fondly hope not!”

“And anyway, there are those prophecies that when the Prince comes the whole world is going to be transformed.”

“You mean, lions and lambs lying down together? That sort of thing?”

“It is there in Scripture.”

“And you think it is actually going to *happen*?”

“Why not?”

“You are insane!”

“Come and see!”

As they approached, they heard Jesus say to John, “But we will have to talk further later. I think I hear Andrew returning.”

“I have enough just in these few moments to occupy myself for months!” exclaimed John.

Jesus laughed again. “If you stay with me, you will have enough to occupy yourself for five lifetimes! But fear not.”

At this point, as the two men entered the room through the open door, Jesus looked at Simon, stroked his beard, and said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called *Kepha*.”

All three looked at him, astonished. “You will be called ‘Rock?’” What could that possibly mean?

“I seem to be making everyone speechless today,” said Jesus. “It is that I am so happy to have at last started on the path that is laid out for me, and found those who will wish to travel it in my company. Let me remind you,” he added, looking at Simon, “of what you heard two days ago,” and Simon, apparently hearing the thunder once again, stared at him, his hair standing up in dread. The others eyed him; this

time, he seemed to know what the thunder said.

“You *do* wish to join me, do you not?” continued Jesus, and all said, “Yes, Rabbi,” and Simon added, “Of course!” in a voice half of terror.

“It is well,” said Jesus. “You have concluded your negotiations here?” he asked Simon.

“Yes, finally!” he exclaimed. “That is, unless they find some further complication. How they can make something so simple into a—a twisted net of words!”

Jesus laughed. “Then perhaps it would be a good idea to escape before they can think of something else. The irony is, of course, that if you choose to follow me, all of this is, as they would say, moot.”

They looked at each other.

“And I must tell you,” Jesus went on, not expecting a reply, “that I myself have something that I must do for the next forty days, after which I can join you in Galilee. And John, you yourself must take a month to decide what kind of life you wish to live—and the two of you would be wise to do the same. If you follow me, your lives will be very, very different.”

“I am certain, Master, that we will follow you, whatever comes,” said Simon.

“You have no idea what you are saying, Simon. You will follow me, but it will be nothing like what you think.”

“It matters not. I am ready for anything.”

“You will remember what you just said on the day you find that you are ready for nothing. But even that will be well. But all of you need a good night’s sleep in preparation for your journey, and I myself must prepare myself. Peace.”

“Peace,” they answered, and he turned and left.

The beginning of that night was anything but restful. Andrew and Simon were together on one side of the room, tossing and turning, with John doing the same on the opposite side. After a while, Andrew whispered to Simon, “So you heard the thunder speak.”

“I heard it again,” whispered Simon, “but this time, I heard—I heard *into* it. I understood what it was saying. It was terrifying!”

“That was our experience when we heard it.”

“I cannot understand why I missed it the first time! And did you see the way he looked at me? He looked right into me!”

“And he repeated a conversation John had that no one could have overheard. There is something *very* strange about him.”

“And yet he is so *ordinary*, on the surface at least.”

“I suspect he has let us glimpse a little below the surface.”

“Well, as to that, you know,” said Simon, “if we are going to convince our parents to let us follow him, he will have to go a good deal below the surface. Can you imagine what they will think?”

“But what can we do? How could we refuse to follow him?”

“Well, we will have to let him worry about it,” and Simon turned over and closed his eyes.

And sleep actually did come, because they were young, in spite of their long and exciting day.

The next day, they set out for Galilee, and when they arrived, they separated, John going to his home and Andrew and Simon to their house, which was now just next door. Their

parents welcomed them with considerable relief, considering that both had been absent from fishing for over two weeks, and in Zebedee's house and firm, only James was there. Simon and Andrew could not bring themselves to mention that they would probably all be absent permanently in a couple of months, deciding to postpone what would certainly be bad news until near the end of that time.

The result was a joyous reunion, at least until Zebedee stormed over. John had evidently told him that he would not be going to Annas's palace, but also would not be continuing to fish for them. He barged in, ranting about how Jesus had somehow seduced John, and he suspected Simon and Andrew, to follow him in some crackbrained notion that he was going to change the whole world. "I never would have thought it of Jesus!" he exclaimed. "He seemed a decent sort, but he is obviously looking for a way to separate us from every shekel we have earned or saved!"

This led to a considerable discussion, in which both Simon and Andrew joined, and tried to convince Zebedee and John, the father, that it was nothing at all like that, and that Jesus did have supernatural powers. Both parents scoffed, and finally things quieted down when Simon mentioned that Jesus was off doing something private ("Private!" sneered Zebedee) for forty days, and John was to consider whether he was going to return to Annas's school or not for a month.

Zebedee's wife, who had come over with him, said that she was going to go up to Nazareth on the morrow to talk to Jesus's mother, who was a very sensible, not to say holy, woman, and see what she thought of the whole matter, and the men agreed that that might be a wise move.

“In any case,” said Simon’s father, “we have a month or more before any of this bursts upon us, and so we can agree to continue as if nothing had happened until then. Perhaps everyone will forget all about it. We will be thinking, of course, but we need not *do* anything until Jesus comes back. Who knows? He himself may have forgotten all about it by then.”

“Well, I can tell you as of this moment,” said Zebedee, “that it will require a miracle on the order of the Twelve Plagues of Egypt to convince me that this is anything but a hoax! It will all but destroy our business! And after we just spent a week combining our two families! Nothing but hired hands! What do they think we can do? We are not getting any younger!”

“I must say,” said Simon’s father, “that I am in agreement, at least as things now stand. Either Jesus is a supernatural being—how absurd!—or he is not. If he is not, then there will be no sign that would convince us, and I am as adamant as you, Zebedee, that I will forbid it. It makes no sense! The whole thing is ridiculous, frankly, and, while I do not want to deny your experience, young people, there are ways of arranging these things. You have not lived as much as we and seen the lengths to which some people will go to—to in a word take other people’s money.”

The young people expostulated, and Simon’s father said, “I know, I know. As I said, either he is a supernatural being or he is not. If he is, he will devise a way that will convince us, and if he is not, then we have reason in being very cautious. But we have a month before all this is to come upon us, and so let us drop the subject and wait. But do not get your hopes up too high.”

There was the usual *denouement* in the conversation after this climax, but the young men had to admit that their parents had reason (to be perfectly frank, they themselves were having doubts now that Jesus was not with them), and so they agreed to let the matter drop until Jesus returned. James's brother John, they heard afterwards, even conceded that he would not tell James until close to the time they were to expect Jesus. "I do not want to influence him too much," he said.

The next day Zebedee's wife went to Nazareth, and returned, bewildered, half convinced that there was something there, but totally at a loss as to what exactly it was. She did put a damper on some of the scoffing of the parents, but did not convince them. "No, if this is something supernatural, I will have to witness a miracle! And no ordinary miracle! Nothing short of it!" exclaimed Zebedee. "Until then, we will wait."

And so they passed a relatively quiet month, with nothing actually said between parents and children, but many looks and much shaking of heads, especially when each thought no one else was looking. It *was* a preposterous idea, if one looked at it calmly, and the only thing it had in its favor is what the thunder said, and what Jesus seemed to know about what he could not have observed. But how much that counted began to fade as the month wore on and the familiar work of fishing became more real. Would they really abandon all this?

John waited for quite a while before he brought the matter up with James. He talked about it beforehand with Andrew, who agreed that it was best not to try to "recruit" James for Jesus, and so he merely made laconic remarks from time to time, trying not to influence him one way or the other. But when the month was all but over he thought he should let

James know what had happened, in as detached and factual a way as possible, so that *if* James also wanted to join Jesus, he would have the evidence John had. James was skeptical.

As the period of waiting drew to what had to be its close, the young men became more and more nervous—and, it must be said, more and more convinced that what they had experienced in Judea was something like a dream. They went on fishing, and it became more and more their real life; they started out at evening, generally, and spent the night at it, so that the women could have their pick of the catch when they came to the market, looking in at the vats with the fish squirming about, and picking out this and that one, which the men then wrapped and gave to them in their own buckets they carried on their heads, to keep the fish alive until the last minute before they cooked them.

Generally, they (and the Zebedees also) had a considerable catch, most of which they got rid of in short order, throwing back what no one seemed to want. It would not do to have two-day-old fish on the morrow; the women insisted that they be fresh.

One night, however, they caught absolutely nothing. This happened every now and then, but fortunately very rarely; but there were times when the fish just seemed to congregate somewhere the fishermen had not yet discovered. Simon cast the last net as dawn lightened the sky, and said to Andrew, “It is time to go back. No luck today.”

Dejected, Andrew rowed back to where the boats were moored, and Simon saw someone on the shore who seemed to be waiting for him. It was Jesus.

“May I use your boat for a while?” he shouted. “I wish to

say a few words to these people.” A small crowd had gathered around him on the shore. Andrew rowed as far in as he could, and Jesus waded over and climbed into the boat, standing on the seat in the stern.

From there, he gave a rather brief talk about the fact that what he called the Reign of God was almost about to begin, and that the people would have to prepare themselves for a new order of things. “You have heard the prophecies,” he said. “They are about to be fulfilled. I will tell you more about what is to happen as time goes on. For now, I simply want to advise you to begin to change your way of thinking, so that you will be ready for the Reign of God when it starts. Try to make yourselves ready.”

“I think that is enough for a start,” he said to Andrew, who was behind him. “And now, if you would go back into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”

Andrew looked back at Simon, who was as exhausted as he. He shook his head and said, “Master, we have been working hard all night, and have caught nothing at all.” Jesus looked at him as if he understood, and so Simon added, “but if you say so, I will throw out the net.”

Andrew rowed more or less at random into deep water, partly to get it over with, and Simon, once they began to drift, half-heartedly threw out the net—and suddenly, it was filled with a huge number of fish, and looked as if it might break.

They called to their mates with Simon’s father in the other boat, and they too rowed over, and both boats were quickly filled until they were almost swamped.

Simon then came back to Jesus and fell at his feet, “Leave me, Master! I am a sinful man!”

“Do not be afraid,” answered Jesus. “From now on, you will be catching men.”

Their father John, who was in the second boat, stared openmouthed at them.

They quickly rowed to shore, and just before Andrew had shipped the oars after Jesus disembarked, and was about to help the others with the catch, Philip, the son of the wine-merchant, ran up panting and shouting, “Zebedee has been run over by a hay cart, and both of his legs have been broken! He looks as if he is going to die!”

Jesus heard him, and said to everyone, “Fear not. He wanted a sign, and this is it; all will be well. But I must go to him. You stay and take care of all these fish first; and fear not. I will fetch John and James. All will be well; you will see.” And he strode off, leaving the group in total confusion, with the two boats full of fish.

Seven

Jesus was off at full speed, with Philip following as well as he could. Andrew saw that he had a stitch in his side, and finally had to stop and rest. He had evidently run down to the boats from the house.

The others, of course, had to take care of the fish, and were considerably delayed. Finally, Andrew felt that everything there was safe enough, and dashed off, with Simon close behind.

Jesus had met John and James already; when Andrew and Simon drew in sight of them, they were running to the house. John burst open the door, and cried, "Is he all right?"

What happened inside was lost on Andrew until they arrived at the door, all out of breath. At that moment, they heard Zebedee exclaim from within, "What happened? The pain is gone! It almost feels as if I could walk!" The two went into the house, still panting.

"Try," said Jesus. "I will help you up." He put his hand under his shoulder and lifted him to a sitting position, and Zebedee swung his perfectly healed legs over the edge of the bed, and stood up. "I cannot believe it!"

“I would not tell this to anyone, if you please; it is not yet my time,” said Jesus. “You may say that you had a narrow escape from something that looked at first to be very serious—which is certainly true.”

“You did this!”

“As I say, I would really prefer that this not be known.”

“How did you do it? How *could* you have done it?”

“Well, I am aware that John has told you a bit about

me.”
“You mean that what he told me was actually *true*?”

“Come, now, Zebedee; you know your son is not a liar.”

“But—but he was spouting some nonsense about the sky opening up and a voice from heaven, and you being able to read his thoughts, and—and I know not what!”

“As I say, he is not a liar.”

“Those things actually *happened*?”

“John was not the only one who saw them. Andrew and Simon here did also—and that was before I had a chance to speak to them and ‘befuddle’ them, as you said. I waited two days, in fact, before I spoke to them.”

“And now you have made my legs whole by simply touching them! It is beyond belief!”

“A great deal that is beyond belief is going to happen in the near future. And not simply by me, but by your two sons and Andrew and Simon, and Philip—you know, the wine-merchant’s son, the one who helped carry you here—and some others you are acquainted with. I have been sent to restore the world to what it lost when Adam disobeyed. And ordinary people will help me and do things that no one since Elijah has been able to do. You will see.”

“I cannot take this in! It is too much!”

“Your son felt thus—he still does. I realize that it is a bit overwhelming. But what I am telling you is true, and I am afraid it was necessary that something drastic happen in order for you to be persuaded. I am sorry for the pain and inconvenience, but it did not last long, and you will come to see that it was necessary.”

Zebedee stood there gaping at him, unable to say a word.

Jesus then turned to Andrew and Simon. “Perhaps it would be well for you to go back and take care of the fish. There is nothing very pressing here.” Andrew and Simon looked at each other and nodded. It was clearly a dismissal. “Fish?” said Zebedee. “What fish?”

“Oh, we had quite a large catch a few moments ago,” said Simon nonchalantly.

“A few moments ago?” After dawn?”

“Jesus told us to throw out the nets, and both our boats were swamped with fish.”

“I do not believe it.”

“Now Andrew and Simon are liars,” said Jesus.

“But—then this also was your doing!”

“They and John did not require anything so drastic—as long as they also were to know what happened to you.”

“I must see this!” said Zebedee, and since he was perfectly healthy, strode toward the shore ahead of Andrew and Simon.

Simon said, “Perhaps Zebedee would consider taking Malachi with us, now that he has not enough men to make a viable fishing business on his own.”

“That sounds like an excellent idea. Malachi is extremely good, and must be at a complete loss with both of his sons gone.”

“I will go after him and see what he thinks. Look at him walking there, as if nothing had happened!”

Andrew, as he walked along slowly, letting Simon also get ahead of him, mused to himself that this—or rather these two events—were obviously the sign their father and especially Zebedee required—in fact, demanded. Was it accidental that it would involve serious injury to Zebedee and his possible death? If only a short time of pain and a severe fright? Was Jesus sending a message that he would do good things—even miracles—for those he loved, but was not to be trifled with? *If* he was God somehow poured into human skin, then this would be consistent with the Master’s behavior in the past. Think of the waters of Meriba and the snakes when the Israelites complained.

In any case, it was certainly effective. How, after this, could Zebedee stand in the way of losing almost all of his fishing fleet? But also if one related it to the past behavior of the Master, it probably also implied that his business would not suffer for the loss either. And it did seem that he had Malachi to make up for some of the loss. Did not Job say, “He bruises people and then bandages them; he wounds them and his hands heal them.” But when one looked at the events in this way, the whole thing was frightening. But from a different point of view, it was extremely clever. Ingenious.

“Who is it I am getting involved with?” thought Andrew, and recalled with some trepidation how often he had all but accused the Master of being unfair. “Am I to suffer some terrible injury for my temerity?” It was by no means impossible, if this was not a coincidence. And how could it *be* a coincidence?

Jesus and John were also coming down to the shore, it seemed; Andrew could hear them walking behind him. He had lapsed into wondering why, if Jesus was what he seemed to be, and what he clearly thought he was, he had been chosen, since in that case, he did not need Andrew or anyone else to do whatever he had to do. “And what *can* I do?” he asked himself. “I know how to row a boat, and perhaps throw out a net. But how could I be a fisher of men?” Up to this moment, he had been supremely self-assured, convinced that he could do anything he put his hand to. But now? For perhaps the first time in his life, he felt totally inadequate.

As if in answer, he heard Jesus say “Fear not”; but it was to John. “I am here,” he continued. “All will be well. I told you that it will be difficult, but all will be well—if you too become a trusting soul.”

“I hope I can be so,” said John.

“*You* cannot. Have no trust in yourself. Trust me. It will not be hard to do so as time goes on. See what I did to your father. You will see much greater things. Nothing is impossible with God.” Andrew surmised that he had heard this because it also somehow applied to him. “And it does almost sound as if he is calling himself God,” he thought. But is not that in effect what the thunder said?

“Very true,” said Jesus, and John turned scarlet. Jesus laughed. Apparently, he had had more or less the same thought, which Jesus answered without hearing any words. He was speaking to two people’s thoughts at once. Amazing, if true.

Shaking his head, Andrew, still deep in meditation, joined the group at the shore, and then Jesus and John came up. John

looked happy to see him. It made his heart warm that John still seemed to admire him, especially after he had been thinking of himself as hopeless.

“As I told you,” said Jesus to them as he came up, “we had an errand to do with Zebedee, who, I believe you have found out, is not really seriously injured after all.”

“I still cannot believe it!” cried Andrew suddenly, waked from his reverie. “You know, Simon had got the idea that we should consult him about taking Malachi as a partner, since he had lost Thomas and Samuel, and he went ahead to find him. And there he was, walking about as if nothing had happened, and moments before, he was at death’s door!

“Yes, well,” said Jesus, “it might not be prudent to advertise the real situation; it is too early, really, but it was necessary if we are to begin properly. Zebedee had reason to be worried. But all will be—if not well, exactly, satisfactory—even there, or I miss my guess.”

“You will not convince Philip of that,” returned Andrew. “You know how he is—or perhaps you do not know. He saw him, and knows that it is a miracle if he merely did not die.”

“Actually, I know that. In fact, I have talked to Philip, and as it happens, he also has seen Zebedee walking, and, in spite of what you might think, Andrew, he was convinced. Ask John here. Philip, by the way, is on an errand for me at the moment.”

“Incredible!”

“I should warn—or perhaps advise—you to prepare yourselves for amazing things. Soon they will begin happening thick and fast, and you yourselves will be doing many of them.”

No one had any reply to that. “James,” said Jesus, partly to break the embarrassed silence, “Could you introduce John to those here he does not know?”

And James, a rather sociable sort, who had apparently met most of them, began introducing them to the newcomers, including Andrew, who was too confounded by all that was going on to pay any attention. The whole episode washed over him like a wave that washed into a boat, and left nothing but more water in the bilge. Well, he would straighten it out as time went on. He was not good at this sort of thing.

“And you found it was not.” an extremely handsome man was saying to John. “I had the same experience, more or less, but only after years of pursuing the studies.”

“Indeed?”

Were they talking about John’s week with the school?

“Judas is a priest,” said James.

“Ah,” said John.

“Of course,” Judas answered, “One is a priest by birth, so there is nothing in that. But one must do *some* studying to discover what one must do, must one not? And I was quite captivated by it at the beginning, I must say.”

“It is a very—one could get very absorbed in it.”

“*If* one is a certain type of person. I imagine it would be a bit confining for one used to the outdoors, such as a fisherman.” Yes, they must have been talking of John’s trial stay at studying to be a rabbi.

“One of the students there . . .” Andrew thought there was something familiar about the man John was speaking with, but could not place him. In answer to what John was saying, he said, “*Did* you! I saw him myself. Did you see him when he

was bathed?” Ah, of course! He was the one he saw just after Jesus. Andrew remembered that he was very good-looking. Yes, this must be the man. And, in fact, he said, “. . . and I happened to be present when Jesus stepped up to be bathed.”

“Then you saw what occurred.”

“I did. Most people said that it thundered from a clear blue sky, but *I* thought the thunder said something. And a bird came from nowhere and lit on Jesus’s shoulder. My hair stood on end.”

“I heard the words—or not words exactly, but—and I saw the dove also.”

“It *was* a dove, now that you mention it. A symbolic bird—of course. And I know what you mean about the words. I thought I was hallucinating.”

“No, there definitely was something, and the thunder meant something like, ‘This is my son, the one I love; I am pleased with him.’”

The man became excited, “Exactly! So it *was* real! At any rate, shortly afterward, I introduced myself to Jesus, and he said he would meet me here in Galilee after forty days. I gather he intended to make a forty day fast to prepare himself for his ministry.”

“Oh, is that what it was?”

“Well, it is pure speculation on my part. But if he *is* the Prince, and is about to make himself known as such, it would sound reasonable.”

So that was why—or probably why—Jesus had not appeared for over a month. This man must have reason; it would be fitting for him to start his new life with a forty-day period of prayer and preparation.

“Well,” said John, “but I must become accustomed to a completely new Jesus, no matter how much he is like the old one.”

“So must we all,” replied Judas. “Even those of us who knew nothing of him before are discovering new wonders in him every day. This business with your father, for instance. Who could do it except the Prince? And I understand that there was a catch of fish before it that was all but miraculous also. And I have no doubt also that he knows—if he wishes—every word we have said.”

“You have had that experience also? I found he not only knows words he could not have heard, but my very thoughts! It is most disconcerting!”

“Actually, I was prepared for it. You see, I did a good deal of studying of Greek philosophy—Plato and Aristotle and especially Plotinus—because when I dipped into it, I found to my astonishment how very close they, especially Plotinus, came to what we Judeans believe in. They proved it scientifically, if you will. And Jesus clearly has what Plotinus called the ‘One’ flowing through his soul. I was not at all surprised that he knew others’ thoughts.”

John, who had never heard of these philosophers, said, “It is—it is a frightening experience.”

“Indeed it is. Fortunately, this incarnation of God, if you wish to put it so, is one of love and not mere indifference, and so one fears with the fear of awe, not of terror.”

Andrew certainly hoped that that was the case.

“I think one can say that. I *hope* one can say that. No, I *know* one can say that. He may be awesome, but he is a friend.”

Andrew turned to Simon, who was beside him. “Who is

that?” he asked.

“Oh, that is one of the two Judases in the group. Judas Iscariot, who is a priest. The other is someone who is so shy, it is embarrassing to speak with him.”

Andrew seemed to remember having been introduced to someone of that sort. But he continued, “And was not this one the one we saw talking to Jesus after he had been bathed?”

“I believe he was, now that you mention it.”

Andrew lapsed into silence. It seemed that this Judas—Judas who? Ah, Iscariot, so from Kerioth. That should be easy to remember—might be a person it would be well to cultivate. He seemed learned, and it sat well on him; he was not parading it, and so might be someone who would not be talking down to people like Andrew, who just happened to have devoted their lives to fishing. He seemed quite easy with John—though of course John could read, and had been studying to be a rabbi.

Well, he would see. Perhaps he would be able to pick up some suggestions on what he should be doing to prepare people for the advent of the Reign of God, whatever that would turn out to be.

At this point Jesus, who was standing at the edge of the group, evidently watching, pointed off in the distance, where two men were approaching, and said, “Now there is a real Israelite; there is nothing devious about him.”

A man approaching, stopped and gaped at Jesus. “Where do you know me from?” he asked.

“Before Philip called you,” replied Jesus, “I saw you—under the fig tree.”

This obviously gave him an intense shock. Andrew

wondered what had gone on under that fig tree to startle him so severely when Jesus merely mentioned that he saw him there. When he found his voice, he exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” It must have been something amazing.

Jesus laughed. “You believe just because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see more marvelous things than that.” He looked up to heaven. “Amen amen I tell you, you will see the sky open up and God’s angels going up and coming down upon the Son of Man!” As he said this he raised and lowered his arms over his chest as if he were following them there.

But the sky did not open this time, and apparently there was to be no explanation of this little exchange, because Jesus then turned to the astonished group and said, “But if you others would excuse the two of us for some moments, I would speak to Nathanael privately. Then, if he wishes, I will introduce him to you.” So this man’s name was Nathanael.

He drew apart, and what was obviously his slave began to follow them. “In a moment, Ezra,” he said. Another remarkable thing was that the slave he was referring to was as black as night, though his skin was shiny and reflected the sunlight in brilliant white patches, and his eyes and teeth would give him away in the shade. He also wore a mantle that was almost as white as the togas the Romans used as their formal wear, which added to his startling appearance.

He did not seem very large until one looked at him, and then Andrew realized that he was almost, if not fully, as big as he was. His black color seemed to diminish him somewhat.

But then Andrew turned his attention to Jesus and—who

was it? Nathanael—who were talking earnestly together. One did not pay attention to a slave, who was simply part of the scenery. This one was an interesting part, that was all.

eight

John was obviously fascinated by the slave, Andrew noticed with amusement. He kept staring at him, not knowing what he was doing, and suddenly the slave smiled a smile that lit up the whole landscape with his white teeth, and then his pink tongue came out and wet his lips. It was not at all clear that this was meant for John, or was just his enjoyment of the scenery; he gave no hint that he had seen John looking at him, and his gaze tranquilly and slowly went around the group, noticing everything, Andrew suspected, while not appearing to notice anything. One had been warned to be careful in the presence of slaves, because they saw all, and might reveal what they saw at the most embarrassing times.

Andrew resolved to watch himself in Ezra's presence. He had practically no experience with slaves, and was rather unused to have someone there whom one was not supposed to notice. One played a game, apparently. One saw the slave without seeing him, and the slave saw everything while seeing nothing.

Nathanael and Jesus were talking in low tones, but Nathanael suddenly blurted, loud enough to hear, "Master, I am nothing *but* fear! I can do nothing! It was from fear that I

did nothing and let Samuel die.” What was this? Samuel was the brother of Thomas, was he not, who had died in that tragic accident recently? He let Samuel die? How? Was he there? Was *he* the man Andrew used to see occasionally as he went by near where Samuel and Thomas and their father anchored their boat—sitting beneath a *fig* tree, near the shore, come to think of it!

The thought occurred to Andrew that if he were Nathanael, he would not have wanted Ezra to hear this. Though, on the other hand, Ezra probably knew it already.

They had lapsed back into inaudibility until again Nathanael said aloud, “*It* is impossible!” But Jesus did not seem to agree, and they resumed their discussion. After a time, the next thing that one could hear was Nathanael saying, “Oh, I will free him now! This instant!” He seemed to say it with relief, for some reason.

“Ezra!” Jesus called, and beckoned to him. “Nathanael has something to say to you.”

“You are a free man from this moment, Ezra,” said Nathanael.

Ezra stared at him in disbelief. “Do you mean what you just said?”

“I mean every syllable.”

“Oh, thank you, Master! And thank *you*!” to Jesus, who simply smiled. “I cannot believe it!”

“Not Master any longer. Simply Nathanael.”

“I cannot believe it! Free!”

“But if you would, Ezra,” said Nathanael, “I would ask the favor of you to accompany me for a while. I am to go to Thomas and try to bring him here—”

“Well, not here.” said Jesus. “I must go to the house of Simon Barjona. I will meet you there. I will introduce you to the others now, and they will tell you where to go.”

“Of course, I will join you,” said Ezra. “Free! I cannot believe it! Thank you so much—”he evidently wanted to add “Master” and could not, and then he looked as if he would call him “Nathanael,” but found he could not do that either.

Jesus brought Nathanael, almost reeling with bewilderment, and Ezra, whose face was almost white because he was smiling so broadly that all one could see was his teeth, to the little group that had been around him. Nathanael looked surprised that he had heard of so many of them:

They talked for a considerable while as people just becoming acquainted do, about inconsequential matters, Nathanael learning who was who, everyone a bit embarrassed at suddenly being thrown together, as well as being part of something far beyond what they could have imagined.

Andrew, out of curiosity, edged over beside Ezra, to see if he really was as tall as himself, and discovered, somewhat to his satisfaction, that he had about a quarter of a handbreadth over Ezra. But Ezra, he noticed, was fully as muscular as he, without an atom of fat upon his body. He would be a formidable opponent in a fight. Interestingly, what he had done was not lost on Ezra, he observed as he turned away. It confirmed his view that slaves noticed everything while seeing nothing. He almost went over to talk to him, but hesitated and went back beside Simon; he had nothing really to say to him (What did one say to a slave that has just been freed? And of what interest was what he had done before that?)

Just then Jesus said, “I think, however, that Nathanael has a task before him that is rather pressing. And I myself have

something that needs to be done with Simon Barjona. Fear not, Nathanael, all will be well.” He turned and rather hurriedly went off in the direction of Simon’s house.

Nathanael stood there, nonplused. “Does anyone know where Thomas is? The one who—who had the accident?”

“I know, Mas—” said Ezra, and stopped, embarrassed. Nathanael did not seem surprised that he knew, for some reason.

“Then you can bring me to him.”

“Well, I know more or less where he is. But we will find him.”

“Lead on, then,” and they left the group.

Philip, who had evidently met the others, said, “Did you know what happened to James’s fath—oh, there you are, John. You must have told them.”

“I did. And they saw him for themselves, even Andrew and Simon. Simon is off at the moment with Zebedee, in fact, trying to persuade him to give up both of his sons to Jesus. I suspect it will be difficult for Zebedee to refuse, after what has happened. I understand that they are trying to see if Malachi—Thomas’s father, you know—might join Zebedee to fill up some of what is now lacking.”

“So you are going to join us and give up your studies as a rabbi.”

“Well, I—I found I was not suited to it.”

“Not intelligent enough?”

“Really, Philip!” interjected James.

“Well, I know nothing about John, except that he catches fish. How was I to know whether he was smart enough to be a rabbi?”

James simply shook his head.

“Do you think (hem)” said the other James to anyone who wanted to hear, “that Nathanael will be able to (hem, hem) rescue Thomas, as one supposes he has been sent to do?”

“I would think,” answered Andrew with confidence, “that if the Master sent him, it is about as certain as that the sun will rise tomorrow.”

“It will require a miracle!” exclaimed Philip. “More than what happened with Zebedee! He was all but a falling-down drunk when last I saw him, and he must have gotten worse since! He was a disgusting sight! All covered with filth! He stank, and not simply of fish any longer!”

“I wonder that you did not refuse him the wine.” said John.

“What could I do? He would only have found someone else. I remonstrated with him, of course, but he ignored me.”

Typical, thought Andrew. How could anyone change anyone else’s way of thinking? And yet, this is what Jesus was expecting them to do. Well, *if* he were really God in human skin, then he would be able to effect this miracle also.

The conversation became general, most wanting to avoid considering a clearly unpleasant topic, but unable to keep it entirely out of discussion, because after all they were waiting for Thomas and Nathanael to appear.

It occurred to Andrew to wonder how Ezra would handle searching out Thomas and having Nathanael rescue him. Ezra was not Nathanael’s slave any longer, but Nathanael, who was worried—apparently terrified—about the task Jesus had set him, would instinctively call on Ezra, which he had no right to do. And Ezra would either lapse back into being a slave again,

or would assert his freedom. It was a ticklish situation. Well, the Master had doubtless foreseen this also and would manage a way around it.

Toward evening, finally they saw Nathanael, Ezra, and an emaciated, but remarkably clean Thomas, in very expensive clothes, walking rather slowly toward them. Thomas looked like a Samuel who had not eaten for weeks. He all but tottered—but evidently out of weakness, not as a drunk, Andrew noticed with relief.

“As you see,” said Nathanael to them when they drew up, “I have brought Thomas, who wishes—he thinks, just as I suspect we all do—to become one of us and follow the Master.”

Philip dashed over. “Then you have seen him! Thank God! The last time you came to the shop, I could hardly recognize you, you were so drunk!”

Nathanael recoiled in horror (like everyone else), as Thomas made a fist and looked as if he might hit him in the face. But then Thomas bit his lips and took a deep breath and said, “When they found me, I was even worse, half dead and seeing things that were not there. But I have been saved—I think—I hope. No, I know.” But he added another “I hope” under his breath.

“I never knew it was you, before you came to me yourself, after you k—” at this point, even Philip realized what he was about to say, and caught himself. “After the accident. Before, I thought it was Nathanael.”

Nathanael was obviously considering what reply to make, when Thomas took another deep breath, and answered, “Well, that was part of the deception that I was practicing. I find,

though, that I was deceiving myself even more than anyone else. Samuel—and my poor father—knew all about me, though I thought I was being so clever.”

“You had *me* completely fooled,” blurted Philip

Andrew and John laughed along with a number of others, an embarrassed laugh. “Not completely,” said Thomas, who had evidently decided that the way to deal with Philip was to take him seriously and ignore his *gaucherie*. “I remember once you told me I looked as if I was drunk.”

Philip flinched. “I was merely joking.”

“No doubt I *did* look as if I was drunk, because I was. I did not realize how drunk I was, and was convinced no one would notice, but you made me drink less, as I remember, for a while. But it caught up with me again. It is insidious.”

Philip looked thoughtful. “How is it that most people can drink and nothing happens, but others become drunks? You would think they would see what was happening and stop before it became too serious.”

“It is not that simple, Philip. I told you it is insidious. At first, I suppose, one *can* stop, but at that point there is no reason to stop. Everyone else drinks wine, and one thinks that one is not drinking any more than anyone else. But one does not notice that one drinks more and more as time goes on, and still believes that perhaps it is a *bit* more than others, but not unusual—and one believes that he can stop any time he chooses. But he finds no occasion to choose, even as life becomes more and more difficult. And then when the crisis comes, he cannot stop, and he even fights when—” he could not go on, and doubled over in sobs.

As everyone looked on in horror and pity, Philip ran up to

him and placed his hand on his back, while the others stood round in embarrassment, “I am so sorry, Thomas! I know you could not help it! But the Master has saved you from it, has he not? It is over!”

Thomas gradually recovered control of himself. He straightened up and looked Philip in the eye, and said, “Oh, no, Philip, it is not ‘over.’ I suppose it never will be ‘over.’”

Does one ever really change? thought Andrew. Was Thomas to be a drunk forever, whether he ever resumed drinking or not? He seemed to indicate that that was the case.

And does that mean that I will spend my life resenting other people who take my place when I could do better than they? But on the other hand, why should I not, if I am better at it than they? —But something told him that there was something wrong with this, though he could not for the life of him see what it was. It sounded like simple justice.

Thomas was continuing, “—*is* past, and the Master has made it possible to begin again—he says.”

“Fear not, Thomas,” said Philip apologetically. “Trust the Master. He can do anything.” God grant that it is so! Thought Andrew. Oh, God grant that it is so!

“It does seem thus,” Thomas answered. “At least I no longer see things that are not there.” He looked around. “You all *are* here, are you not?” The others laughed another embarrassed laugh.

“Do not fear that you must not mention what happened,” said Nathanael to everyone at large, who began to take this very lesson from what they saw, “Thomas told me that he would like to have you call him ‘Didymus,’ Greek for ‘Twin,’ precisely so that the memory of Samuel can be kept alive. And

by the way,” he added as an afterthought, “you might call me Bartholomew.”

Ah, the son of Talmai, that rich man up in Cana, thought Andrew. Perhaps his being under the fig tree and not at home had something to do with his father.

Nathanael then went over to Thomas and began to introduce him to those standing about, and saw that Thomas was as surprised as he had been at how many of them he knew of, and perhaps had met at one time or another. Andrew took his hand in a very friendly manner; he felt it tremble in his firm grip (he was careful not to squeeze hard), and said, “I have heard of you and your brother. My own brother Simon is not here at the moment. He is negotiating with Zebedee to combine our fishing businesses into one—and I think with your father, if I am not mistaken—”

Thomas’s face flamed, and Andrew realized that he also had stepped into quicksand. Malachi had disowned Thomas, after all. He tried to recover himself by saying quickly, “Since not only Simon and I, but both of Zebedee’s sons have decided to follow Jesus. He has but the hired hands at the moment.”

James came up behind Andrew and took his hand, “I am James, Bar-Zebedee. We are here because, though my father rather expected John here,” he nodded at John beside him, “to leave us and do things religious, he is not quite reconciled to the fact that Jesus seems to have stolen both of us from him.” John nodded, and took his hand also. Andrew noticed a peculiar expression on John’s face, perhaps because it appeared that he was shaking hands with Samuel.

“What is this ‘following’ that we are supposed to be

doing?” asked Thomas.

“Know you not?”

“I know nothing except that I was a drunk and now I seem not to be. Nathanael told me that he could rescue me; beyond that I know nothing of him—except that he told me that he would like me to ‘follow’ him, for some reason. And he seems to know things.”

James laughed. “It is difficult not to do follow him if he calls you, is it not?” and John added, “He is the Prince; I am convinced of it. We are to be his retinue. That is what it is.”

“Now John,” said James. “You do not *know* this.”

“Nonsense! I do not *know* the sun will rise tomorrow—or rather,” he said, looking up at the western sky—“that it will be overcast. But facts are still facts. Of *course* he is the Prince.”

“Prince?” asked Thomas.

“Know you not?” said John. “The one the prophesies have written of. The Son of David, who is to be King.”

Nine

Thomas's eyes widened. "Of a truth?"

"We were down in Judea when John started speaking of him," said John. Thomas and Nathanael looked confused, and John, seeing this, said, "John is a person that has been causing a tremendous amount of controversy, bathing people in the Jordan down there, telling them that he is the forerunner of the promised Prince, and that we should prepare ourselves. I happened to be there, though James stayed here to keep the business going—I was to enter into studies at the Temple, and my—at any rate, I was there with Andrew and Simon, who had decided to take a little holiday and see this preacher."

"And we were enthralled," said Andrew. "He had everyone convinced that we were about to enter a new age." And then he actually pointed out who it was that he was referring to," continued John, "one day that Jesus walked by. He said that he had bathed him also (he bathed us too, of course) and saw the Spirit come upon him like a dove, and that was how he knew who he was."

"And of course, as soon as we heard it, we went after

Jesus,” continued Andrew, “and spent the day with him. John may have been forceful, but *he*—well, of course, you have met him.”

“We knew we were to be ‘students’ of his, as he called us, as if he were a rabbi,” said John, “but he mentioned that he would not be available for a couple of months, and that we should resume what we had been doing. ‘I will see you again, never fear,’ he said.” (At this point, James took John aside and told him, “Be not quite so enthusiastic about what you are interested in, remember. You tend to make others bored if you are not careful.”)

“And sure enough,” Andrew continued, “as we were in the boats not too long ago, mending our nets, he came by and told us to follow him—and we did, as did James and Simon, leaving poor Zebedee confounded and, truth be told, a bit indignant. That is what Simon is trying to patch up at the moment.” He did not think he should complicate the narrative by mentioning the catch of fish.

Nathanael then stepped back in and said, “But let me introduce you to the others.” He brought Thomas to James the Owl, who said, “I am (hem) pleased to make your acquaintance. I had (ha) heard of your plight from Nathanael—or should I now say (hem) Bartholomew?”

“Call me whatever you like,” answered Nathanael, clearly annoyed.

“So like you,” said James. “It gratifies me,” he said to Thomas, “to see that you are (ha) recovered.” Andrew, who had no particular liking for James, wandered off by himself to think. There was so much—too much—to think about.

He began to feel a bit more secure as he looked over the group. They were all, except possibly Judas Iscariot, completely incompetent in any kind of political enterprise, and still more so when it came to instilling religion into people—which they would have to be doing if Jesus were—was—God and they were to have God as their king in the person of Jesus. And how could any of them handle Rome? If Simon the Revolutionary had his way, they would all be hanging on crosses within a fortnight. Change their way of thinking? They would have to change everything about themselves!

Judas seemed to confirm Andrew's impression. He was saying to Thomas, "We will sort ourselves out in a short time. We are in one sense a rather rag-tag group, but the Master knows what he is doing; you will see." Andrew fervently hoped so, but could see no way it could be accomplished. But then, he could have foreseen no way to persuade Zebedee to let John and James and Simon and himself go. And it was all done so neatly and quickly! With a few moments of intense pain, to be sure, but no lasting damage.

But that seemed to indicate, did it not, that all would not be smooth sailing under gentle breezes; there would be squalls to face. But with Jesus in the boat, they would get through them.

John at the moment was about to break into a dispute with Simon the Revolutionary about the direction the group was to take. Andrew thought Simon's idea was absurd. An army à la Maccabee would be snuffed out at once by the immense power of Rome, and Jesus, if he was what Andrew could not help thinking he was, could vanquish Rome in a moment with twelve legions of angels. Why get this crowd

involved in bloodshed in that case? It made even less sense than what he had seen happen—which was unbelievable, but at least not irrational.

John confirmed his thoughts by saying to Simon, “Oh, please! Do we look like the makings of an army?” Even less so now, thought Andrew, with a reformed—if he *was* reformed—drunk among them.

“You never know,” answered Simon. “I imagine those who followed Judas Maccabeus did not look like much at the beginning. We will see, we will see.”

“We will never see *that*, I am certain.”

“Yes, well, many are certain of many things.” Andrew sided with John.

“But I did not have a chance to tell you—Didymus—” said John, eager to end the wrangle they kept having, “how very happy—how *very* happy—I am to see you here.” Andrew wondered if this effusiveness was due to Thomas’s—or rather Didymus’s—resemblance to what had been his friend, of whether there was some connection John had to the accident, and that he was glad to see that at least Thomas had survived it.

“Why thank you—John, is it?” said Thomas. “The names are running by me so quickly I lose them as soon as I hear them. But I fear I am no great addition to anything.”

“Fear not. You will do great things. We all will do great things; I am convinced of it.”

“By the way,” broke in Andrew, just reminded of something, “did you know that Jesus’ mother has been invited to a wedding in Cana tomorrow? And that it looks as if we will be going also?” Thomas flinched at this, and Andrew realized

that this would be a real trial for him, since he would be expected to drink a toast to the bride and groom. Well, it would just be an occasion, he supposed, for some fresh miracle on Jesus's part. He smiled to himself. He was actually expecting miraculous things now.

"Indeed?" said John, looking at Thomas. He evidently hoped it was not true, for Thomas's sake.

"I believe so," answered Andrew. "That is why Jesus is at Simon's house now. He is speaking to his wife and her mother about the arrangements; it is her sister who is about to be married, and he is trying to see if we will be a burden on the couple."

"I can see why," said Thomas. "Probably whoever invited her and Jesus had no idea that it would involve eight or ten more people." He also sounded eager that it might prove impossible.

"Exactly. And I do not think they are especially well off. So perhaps Jesus will go alone; I would suspect that that would be the most sensible thing. But Simon gave me the impression that he (I mean Jesus) would like to bring us along, if it were possible. Perhaps Jesus will subtly supply some financial help, somehow." Or another spectacular miracle. Why not?

"He wishes to make a sort of public display of us as a group, I suspect," said Nathanael. "We are presumably the core—or part of it—of whatever it is that he is planning."

And *the* great miracle would be precisely whatever he was planning, thought Andrew. He seemed to be going out of his way to pick misfits, at least as far as "changing the way the world thinks" went—or whatever it was. Judas Iscariot could perhaps manage it well—he looked as if he could do anything

well, even wield a sword if Simon the Revolutionary's view was accurate—but the other Judas looked too shy for anything. And, let us face it, what good would a team of fishermen be for such an enterprise? And there were so many of them! Granted, Andrew felt at home among them, but how did you go about persuading people if you smelt of fish? He thought back to his reaction to John when they met after his week with soap.

And *what* would one do with Philip? Or the James that kept clearing his throat? Perhaps Thomas could make something of himself if he could control his desire for wine—but even at that, he was simply a fisherman. And Nathanael, perhaps, was cultivated enough to move in upper-class circles, but he seemed to be either supremely lazy, based on what Andrew had seen as he went by him in fishing—or possibly he was even more timid than Judas Thaddeus.

The more one thought of them, the likelier it seemed that they were gathered *because* they were misfits. Jesus wanted to rescue them from their failures somehow. Then how precisely, thought Andrew, will *I* turn out to be incompetent, and how will Jesus remedy it? Andrew began to contemplate the multitudinous tasks that seemed to be required, for which he had no talent whatever. It was anything but a comfortable feeling, especially after feeling so sure of himself. “Or have I got some serious fault that I know not, or am only dimly aware of? And how would I get rid of it, not really knowing it?”

And then there was Ezra. How did a black man like him fit in, if at all? John, who at the moment, was engaged in chit-chat with Andrew—that sort of conversation that went on when one was thinking of something else—had Ezra in the corner of his eye, as Ezra and Thomas were standing apart from

the others, engaged in a rather serious discussion. Nobody else had given Ezra the least attention at all, striking as his appearance was, presumably because they still thought of him as a slave, whom one did not notice. The thought occurred to Andrew how infuriating this must be to the slave. He would have to find something to say to Ezra, if only to break the pattern.

At one point, Thomas laughed aloud, calling attention to the two of them. "If ever I need lessons in how to be a successful slave, I know who to come to for instruction," he said. Ezra laughed with him.

John, who had come to a pause in his own conversation, wandered over to them and said, "What was this you found so amusing?"

Ezra gave Thomas a knowing look. What was *that* about? Thomas said to John, "Oh, Ezra was telling me how slaves manage to manipulate their masters, and I said I knew who to go to if I needed lessons in how to be a slave."

"How does it feel, Ezra," said John, "to be a free man?"

"At the moment, John," (as he said the name without any "Master" preceding it, John reacted for an instant, but recovered himself) "it is not so very different. I find it somewhat frightening, however, because my decisions now have consequences. When I merely did what my master ordered, the consequences were his."

"Yes," returned John, after a moment's thought. "I have heard people who leave the army say much the same thing."

"But I will learn." He gave John a huge smile. "We all have a great deal to learn, I think," he said.

"True." He looked around a bit nervously, and then saw

with relief that Jesus was approaching. “And we have found the perfect rabbi and master. And here he comes—with his mother and Simon.”

Jesus and Simon were engaged in earnest conversation when they approached, with his mother contributing a remark here and there.

John ran up as they came near, and told them that they had met Thomas, and Jesus said, “Yes, we are nearly complete now. There is one more, but I think that it will be some time before he joins us.”

So there *was* method in what Jesus was doing. He was actually *looking* for these people, and for the one whom they had not encountered as yet. It was silly to say that he chose them because they were incompetent, so there must have been something else they had in common. What could it be?

Something they lacked that Jesus needed to supply? That seemed to be the case with Thomas and probably Nathanael. And, thought Andrew, it could be the case also with my brother, because he was apt to be rash and needed to be guided, as he now realized he had been guided by their father. And I, of course. How could I ever do what would be expected of me? And what of John? He seemed very worried about something; perhaps he too needed watching. Perhaps that was it; they all needed watching, for one reason or another, and Jesus wanted them close to him to keep his eye on them and direct them into the path that led to their salvation.

But who could tell? It was all very confusing.

“But,” John was saying, looking over at Thomas, “are we going to the wedding-feast? Or will you go by yourself?”

Jesus’s mother answered, “You were never slow, John, in

getting to the point. Give us a moment to breathe. Who is this new member you have?” John took her arm and all but dragged her to meet Thomas, who bowed. Jesus went off to the side, letting his mother be the center of attention. He seemed interested in what his “students’” conversation would be, rather than in dominating it.

“I am very happy to make your acquaintance, Thomas,” she said. “My son speaks highly of you?”

“He does?” said Thomas in amazement. “I cannot think on what grounds.” He blushed in embarrassment.

“Oh, he sees what is inside a person,” she answered. “I imagine you were a bit—shall we say taken aback?—by some of the rest of the group. Their outside in some cases is not prepossessing.” So Jesus’s mother saw what Andrew had noticed; but she seemed not concerned about it.

“He told me that I must trust him,” he replied. “I personally have no choice, but as Judas, I think it was, said, he seems to know what he is doing.”

“Have no fear on that score,” she said, “though of course, I *would* say such a thing, being his mother. But precisely because I *am* his mother, I can claim to know him better than anyone else; and I assure you, he is eminently worthy of your trust.”

“I hope so, my Lady,” Thomas seemed to have caught the regal air she possessed. “I myself am the person I am afraid to trust. I fear I have no capacity to do ‘great things,’ as people seem to be predicting of me.”

She laughed. “Fear not. If he thinks you will do them, then you will do them. You will see. Fear not. Consider what you have done already.” Jesus seemed to have talked rather

extensively about Thomas to his mother.

“I find it not full of accomplishments, I am afraid,” Thomas said, after a pause.

“But you are only looking at it from a certain point of view. He looks from all points of view. You will see. Fear not.”

“I will try, my Lady.”

“He asks no more.” She turned from him to say something to John and then turned back, “Not even success.”

That was interesting. Perhaps there was hope for Andrew yet.

“I am already amazed, truth be told, my Lady. But it is all his doing. I was just thinking that I fit David’s notion of himself as a ‘worm, not a man.’”

She laughed. “Ah, but look at what David made of himself, with the Lord’s help.”

“Oh, but I am no David! Far from it!”

“Trust him. He knows what he is about.”

“In my case, I have no alternative. To trust in myself is to trust a worm, and that is despair.”

She laughed again. “Fear not.”

“*He* will have to bring that about, I suspect. But I will try. I am gratified to hear you say that I need but try, not necessarily succeed.”

“I meant that. You will see. The success is secondary. He could do it all himself, but he wishes that we join him.”

“If I can.”

“Of yourself, you cannot. None of us can. But trust him.” And *there* was wisdom, thought Andrew. If I only could keep it in mind!

“Well, as I said, I will try—or at any rate, I will try to try.”

She laughed once more.

But how does one try to try when one does not know what to try for? Andrew was sorely tempted to walk away and go back to the fishing boat—but of course, Simon would not be there.

Ten

BUT JOHN WAS GROWING A BIT impatient about the wedding feast, and broke into the conversation with, “But then are we all going to the wedding on the day after tomorrow? If so, we must prepare, you know.” Simon, who had joined them, seemed to think that there would be no difficulty with there being such an increase in the guests, but Mary was not quite so sure. “I will keep my eyes open,” she said. “It would not be just if we turned a happy day into an embarrassment.”

As Simon was speaking, John saw Thomas out of the corner of his eye, and said, “Simon, you have not yet met Thomas, who now calls himself ‘Didymus,’ in honor of his brother, who died, you know, in that tragic accident.”

“I have heard much about you in the past,” said Simon, “though as rivals at the time, we never met. I am happy to see you here.” His emphasis on “happy” probably had something to do with the fact that he had been meeting with, among others, Thomas’s father, who had disowned him.

Thomas answered, “I had also heard of you and Andrew, not to mention John and James. I was astonished at seeing all

of you.”

“Almost as astonished, I imagine, as we ourselves are at being here. But he knows what he is doing.” Andrew, the more he thought about it, the more inclined he became to doubt it. The whole thing was absurd!

John said, “Then matters are settled? My father is mollified?”

“Well, at least not discontented. The joining of our hired hands and—and another person—makes the business viable and even perhaps somewhat better than either of ours was by itself. He still grumbles, but I think he sees it and accepts it. Of course, what else can he do?” There was that, of course. All might be well, thought Andrew.

He came over to them and said, “I am delighted to hear it. I was sure that you could work something out.”

“I would that you had been there, Andrew,” returned Simon.

“No, it is as well I stayed,” he said. “You have the tongue, and my appearance there would only have emphasized what they were losing.” Well, he *did* have the tongue, as he showed with the lawyers, and Andrew’s huge frame *would* advertise that fishing, at least, would be worse without him. At this thought, he mentally patted himself on the back for being just—and then remembered that Jesus was hardly gaining if Andrew was now to be a fisher of men.

John had turned to Ezra and asked in a low voice, “What do you think, Ezra? Will we be able to survive the wedding-feast?” Thomas was right beside him, and, though he was lost in thought, John did not want to mention his name.

“That is the question, is it not, youngster,” he answered,

having caught his drift. “Everyone says Jesus knows what he is doing, and all the evidence is that they are correct. In that case, we have nothing to worry about.”

“If I could but make myself believe that.”

“Well, we can also keep our eyes open.”

Thomas turned to John, and asked, “Which of the two is the older, Simon or Andrew?” he asked.

“Simon, of course.”

“Ah, then that explains it.”

“What?”

“Why it was that Simon did the talking. One would have thought, just from looking at them, that Andrew would have done a better job.”

John laughed. “Muscles do not necessarily mean diplomatic skills.”

“No, what I meant was that Andrew seems—how shall I say it?—in control of things.” In *control!*, thought Andrew. If anyone is *out* of control, it is I!

John replied, “Oh, he is. But it is true, Simon has the tongue. Sometimes a bit too much of it. But it seems to have been adequate to the task this time at least.” Andrew glowed inwardly at the praise and even, it must be said, at John’s thinking Simon sometimes had “too much” tongue.

Ezra remarked, “It is difficult not to judge on first appearances, but the problem is that is difficult to judge *correctly* on first appearances. Or on appearances at all.”

“That is true,” said John aloud, “and it means that I will have to get to know you better. There is much beneath *your* appearance.” Andrew saw that John had taken quite a liking to Ezra, and felt a twinge that Ezra might supplant him in John’s

eyes. “Bah! He is—or was—but a slave!” he thought.

“There is much beneath it,” answered Ezra, with one of his brilliant smiles, “that I myself know not.” What could that mean? thought Andrew.

“I hope that is true of me also,” said Thomas. “All of you seem to detect something in me that I have never been able to discover.”

“That, if I may say so,” replied Ezra, “is because you have also been a slave right up to this very morning, whether you realized it or not.”

Thomas thought for a moment. “A different kind of slave,” he admitted, “but I see your point. I was a slave, obeying the orders of drink. It is a new way of looking at it.”

“I suspect that most people are slaves to something or other, and only think they are free, when they are actually led on by this or that. I was lucky, in that sense. It was obvious I was a slave; but when one is enslaved by something inside oneself, one probably thinks of oneself as free.”

Ezra seemed quite bright, at least as far as human relations went, mused Andrew. Of course, that was probably to be expected of a slave, who had to know how to manipulate people, and especially of a slave to Nathanael, who had practically nothing to do but observe others. . . . But then, am I a slave of something inside me that I do not recognize? And what? What do I desire, more than anything? A just world, where everyone is recognized for what he is, and treated equally; and what is wrong with that?

Thomas was saying “—my vice was making me do things, and ruining my life and the lives of those around me. If I could but undo it!”

“And Bartholomew wishes the same thing,” said Ezra.

John nodded, “And so do I, indeed.” Aha! So John also had something—some “vice” at least in his own eyes—that he considered himself a slave to! Andrew wondered what it could be. He showed nothing to Andrew in all the time he had known him—unless his very liking for Andrew was a vice. He smiled at the thought. And why can I not see whatever inside me requires that Jesus keep me in view?

But this is all nonsense! The reason he picked each of us probably has nothing to do with my idea of why he did it.

Thomas, however, laughing, replied to Ezra, “Perhaps we have all been chosen because we were all slaves to something, and Jesus wished to set us free.”

“There may be something in that,” said John. And as to that, if there ever was a free man, it is the Master—and possibly Judas Iscariot.”

“Think you?”

“Why, do you see something in him?”

“No, not really.”

“I think,” said Ezra, “what Thomas is referring to is what I have noticed from what I have seen of him. Judas is too perfect. He is exceedingly handsome, and brilliant—he is a priest, you know, Thomas.”

“No, indeed?”

“Indeed. So in addition to being intelligent, he is very learned. And he is graceful, and apparently strong, and almost anything else you can name—and humble, in the sense that he makes no boasts of his qualities, though he does not deny them. And yet . . . And yet I feel as you do. With the Master, it is different. He is all that Judas is—of course, less strikingly

beautiful as a man—but it sits well on him. He is above us, and he knows it, but—how shall I say it?—it does not please him, particularly; it is but a fact. With Judas, it is a fact, and he is quite happy about it.”

“Come now, Ezra, you are being unjust,” said John.

“Am I? Thomas feels it. Is this not what you feel?” he asked Thomas.

“I have barely seen him, so I could not say. Perhaps we are being unjust, but the vague impression I got was something along the lines you were saying.”

“Perhaps we *are* unjust. But I have had much and much time to study people. I may be mistaken, but I think not.”

Interesting, thought Andrew, and lost the drift of the conversation. I had been thinking of Judas as supremely qualified for whatever the Master wanted, and here Ezra, who has had “much and much time to study people” finds him too perfect to be true.

John was saying “—aster chose him, and as everyone says, he knows what he is doing.”

“I wonder,” answered Ezra. “Did the Master choose him—as he clearly chose you and Bartholomew—and me—or did he choose the Master?”

At this, Andrew came over and said, “As to that, I was there when John was bathing everyone, and Judas came up to be bathed, just after Jesus. We all thought that it had thundered, and some heard a voice, and there was the bird that John mentioned afterward, which was the sign he had been told to look for—though I hear that he actually knew Jesus before; he was his cousin, or something—and Judas immediately spotted who it was, and after he dried off, asked

if he could become a follower of Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said that if he went to Galilee, by the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, he would find him in a month or two. It was only after that that John pointed Jesus out to John and me, and we followed him ourselves.”

“Interesting,” said Ezra.

“But the Master *does* know what he is doing,” said Andrew, “and he would not permit himself to be ‘chosen’ by anyone if he did not wish him to be among us.”

“I suppose you are right,” said Ezra. You must be right, of course. No one manipulates the Master.”

“Well I think you are all being hard on Judas for no reason,” said John. “I see nothing wrong with him. I like him.”

Thomas said, “Oh, we see nothing *wrong* with him. Just the opposite. Ezra was saying that his problem was that there was too much right with him.”

“That sounds to me like nothing but simple jealousy.”

“And so it may be, youngster,” said Ezra. “Our problem seems to be that we really have nothing much to talk about at the moment except each other—and that inevitably means finding fault with each other.” He laughed, and the others joined in.

Still, thought Andrew, if Jesus was choosing people who needed to be watched, who was to say that Judas did not need to be watched even more than most?

Nonsense!

Jesus suddenly broke in, “We are almost, but not quite, ready to start announcing that the reign of God is just about to begin, and to prepare people to change the way they think

about things. Another few days, I expect. But I think we had best be thinking now about something more practical: where each of us intends to spend the night—and to see to it that each has a wedding-garment ready on the morrow for the day after.

Andrew cast an amused glance at Thomas in what must have been Nathanael's father's expensive clothes, and who was looking down at them in worry, doubtless because he had no others, and had not really noticed them when he received them. Nathanael came over to him and said, "Fear not, Thomas. What you are wearing at the moment will do very nicely. I dare say even that it will surpass many of the others, who, after all, were fishers like you."

At this, Andrew wondered what he himself would wear. Even his Sabbath robes were quite shabby, and what else did he have? But no one else's would come near fitting him.

Ezra, who was looking on in a detached way, noticed Andrew's concern, and said, "I think I have something that you might be able to use, Andrew, if you do not mind putting on what used to be the livery of a slave. Of course, Bartholomew was always discreet and tasteful, and so it will not look like livery when you are wearing it. It will be a little tight on you, but I think you could get into it."

Andrew looked at him, at first skeptically and then with some confidence at his size. "Why thank you, Ezra, if you think Bartholomew would not mind."

"They are *my* clothes, Andrew. They only *were* his."

Andrew flushed. "Of course. I was not thinking. Excuse me." What a stupid mistake!

"Apology accepted." Ezra smiled, and so did Nathanael,

but Nathanael's smile was a bit rueful, Andrew noticed. He had evidently thought of the clothes as his, and only realized with Ezra's remarks how ridiculous that was.

Ezra said, "I will fetch them tonight. I expect that Bartholomew and I will be sleeping in Cana. The wedding itself is in Cana, is it not?" He looked over at Nathanael, who nodded.

"I do not think it worth while to go around to Bethsaida," said Philip. "If one of you can find room for me, I will stay here in Capernaum. In that way, we can be back here early enough tomorrow."

John immediately offered him his house, which had a spare room, and he accepted gladly.

Nathanael looked up at the sky, and said, "But the sun is about to set, and perhaps we had best be started. The hill is a rather long climb, and a bit rough at night. Would you join us, Thomas?"

Thomas noticed that John was coming over as if to invite him also to his own house, but when John heard Nathanael, he turned to make a random remark to Simon, leaving Thomas free, and Thomas said, "Thank you, Nathanael," and went after them as they turned to climb the rather steep ascent. Andrew and the others went home for the night.

The next day, they convened once more at the shore, Andrew waiting with some misgivings for Ezra, since he was not really convinced that he could fit into anything Ezra would have. It did not bother him that it had been the livery of a slave; but he did notice that he was feeling strange in wearing clothes that originally went over a black body, as if the color would transfer itself to the clothes and then him. When the

thought became even half-conscious, he said to himself, “How ridiculous!”

Eventually Thomas and Nathanael also appeared, with Ezra carrying a load of clothes. At first, Andrew thought of this as normal, and then realized that Ezra was not a slave any longer—and then realized again that they were Ezra’s clothes, and why should he not be carrying his own clothes? It would take time to get used to his not being a slave and being a person like the rest of them.

Ezra went up to Andrew and showed him the clothes, and Andrew tried on the cloak, which was the most important of the garments, and, to his joy, it almost fit him. “I had no idea you were that big, Ezra,” he said.

“Actually, we selected this one because it is a little large for me; I used to use it when I had some task that would require moving around a great deal. But if you do not try fishing in it, it seems as if it will serve very nicely.”

“And you have a tunic also. That is well. My tunic looks rather—forlorn—inside it.”

“I expect you will be able to get into that also, though you might have a bit more trouble moving once you put it on. But it is only for the wedding and the reception, where you have nothing to do, except congratulate the bride and groom and drink wine.”

At this, Andrew cast a glance in Thomas’s direction, which Thomas pretended not to notice.

eleven

The conversation up to this point, insofar as it had any definite topic, had centered around asking Jesus when they would begin the announcement of the start of what Jesus called the “reign of God,” and how they would go about it.

Jesus now answered that it would not happen until after they had attended the Passover the next week, and that he had in mind some events that would prepare for it. “I plan to give a speech somewhere around here stating what the new reign of God is going to be like—probably up the mountain over there, where there is that plateau halfway up where people could gather and hear well. But we will see how things develop. I expect it would be unwise to begin in Judea.”

This caused some discussion, since Judea seemed to some the logical place to begin, while others thought that it would be better to have the movement established before confronting the Judeans, who might not like the idea of their authority being, if not trampled on, diminished. Jesus held himself aloof from actually joining in the conversation, but seemed to be listening intently, gauging the readiness of his followers to

accept his lead.

Judas Iscariot figured heavily in this discussion, since, as a priest himself, he had a fairly good finger on the pulse of the establishment in Judea. His opinion seemed to coincide with that of Jesus, since he said that if one were to try to make the Judean priesthood change their way of thinking, one would have to do it gradually and very diplomatically, somehow convincing them that *they* were the authors of the change, rather than that a Galilean upstart was telling them that he was right and they were wrong.

“What is wrong with being a Galilean?” asked John, his face immediately flushed with anger, and some others murmured agreement.

“Nothing at all. You are as good Judeans in the generic sense as the people living in Judea. But you know that *they* do not think so. The idea of a prophet coming from Galilee is laughable to them.”

“Well, they will have to become used to it!”

“Granted. But since they think that they are the only true Judeans, it will take considerable diplomacy to make them give up the idea.”

“Either that,” broke in Simon the Revolutionary, “or a movement so strong that they will have no power against it, especially if here in Galilee we show how we can shake off the Roman chains.”

Several of them opined that that would be a miracle beyond anything they had so far seen, to which Simon responded, “Exactly. But who can say if it will not happen?” Jesus looked a bit bemused. John had by this time cooled back down.

Andrew did not have a great deal of stomach for such speculation. The Master knew more than all of them combined, and the opinions of each were nothing but ignorance parading itself. The real question was how they would go about announcing the reign of God, and what it meant, and whether they would themselves perform miracles to prove that they were not simply like the fanatics one saw at Passover, announcing new interpretations of Daniel and Ezekiel—people no one bothered to listen to.

And if they were to perform miracles, would they involve things like casting out demons? Andrew shuddered at the thought; he wanted nothing to do with demons; but Jesus already had confronted a couple, whom he had ordered out of people.

In any case, the day passed, without anyone's actually becoming enraged at anyone else, though there were a few instances in which John and—less often—James made a remark or two that could be construed as intemperate. But they had both been trying hard to quell their hot tempers, and quickly cooled down, especially when others agreed with their main point, and only added caveats and qualifications.

Andrew happened to overhear John say to Ezra, "So you think he deliberately insulted you?" He wondered who he was referring to. Not himself, he hoped, thinking of the episode of thanking Nathanael for Ezra's loan of his clothes.

"No, I would not exactly say that. I think he thought that I was insulting *him* by approaching him on my own to speak to him. Slaves do not do such things." So it was someone else. Who?

"But you are not a slave."

“John, John, to some people, once a slave, always a slave. And I suspect, especially if one is black.”

“Well, I think—at least I *hope*—that you are misinterpreting him. Perhaps he was preoccupied at the moment.”

“Perhaps. But I think I will not make a second attempt. If he wishes to speak to me, he may approach me. I will receive him with the utmost cordiality, you may be sure.” Now came the dazzling smile.

“I would imagine that you received many slights when you were a slave.”

“More than I could count. People would speak of me—with me standing right there beside them—as if I were some kind of statue they were appraising. And the way they discussed my ‘strange color!’ There were times I almost screamed. And of course, I was not something to be spoken *to*, except to order to do this or that. But one learns after years of putting up with it that it does not matter. One is what one is, and the fact that one is enslaved—or looks different—is not a reflection on one’s person, but on the conditions under which one happens to be—and what others think reflects on them more than it does on oneself.

“One either learns that or is repeatedly beaten, and dies trying to run away. Because, of course, the arrangement is such that one never can earn enough money to buy one’s freedom. Why would an owner allow such a thing? He would only have to train a new slave. And, of course, one learns to respond politely to the severest insult, as if nothing had happened.”

Andrew thought how intolerable it must be to be a slave, especially one so foreign-looking as Ezra. To be thought of as

a—thing, as one thinks of a cart that one uses to haul things, or one's boat. True, fishermen sometimes personalized their boats and even talked to them, but everyone knew that that was playing games. When one talked to a slave, he understood what one was saying and resented not being considered as something that could give an intelligent reply. Andrew could not have borne that for even a day.

“But are you going to be one of us?” John asked Ezra. “Jesus has not exactly said you are, and has not said you are not.”

“I think he would accept me. But as to myself, I rather think I would prefer to be a kind of observer rather than an active member of whatever he is going to do. I perhaps, because of my color more than anything else, would be too much of a curiosity to do much good. Perhaps I can learn from him and go back to spread his doctrine in Ethiopia. We shall see.”

The trouble, of course, was that no one really knew what Jesus was really up to; they only had, each of them, some experience of his remarkable powers, but what this Reign of God would mean was a complete mystery. Would he try to reinstate the Judges of old, without a king, letting the Master be king, speaking through prophets, or would Jesus be a kind of spokesman himself for the Master? But then what?

But it again drew toward evening, and John invited Thomas and Nathanael and Ezra to stay with Philip at his house there in Capernaum, so that they would not have to face the trek they had made the previous night and morning.

While they were discussing this, Andrew and Simon went next door to their own house, (where Jesus and his mother

were staying). Andrew still rejoiced at having his own room, and took his time undressing as he looked out at the lake reflecting the moon, and distorting it into a trail of pallid light.

The next day, after a rather festive breakfast, made more festive by the presence of Mary, who joined them for only a short time before she mounted her donkey to go up the hill to help with the celebration proper, they donned their wedding garments and joined the others at their customary meeting-place. Andrew found Ezra's tunic a little confining, as Ezra had predicted, and was practicing how to move without seeming to look as if he was about to split the seams on the back. It demanded almost military posture, and Andrew contented himself, as he walked about rather gingerly, that it was good for him, and would help get rid of the stoop that he was acquiring from rowing the boat.

Andrew looked over at Thomas, talking with Jesus, and was amused when he saw him stroke what was obviously a small wineskin of some sort that he kept concealed under his cloak. The problem was that his hands went to it so often that he advertised that it was there, and he might just as well have carried it out in the open. But people have their little self-deceptions. Andrew supposed that he kept it because he could not bear not to have it available, in case his thirst became intolerable; and, he supposed, the mere fact that it was there kept the thirst from ever becoming intolerable. It was a little like befriending someone one was hopelessly in love with; one could not stay away, and contented himself with thinking all he was doing was keeping up a platonic friendship.

A dangerous ploy, thought Andrew, and probably what Thomas was consulting Jesus about. And it seemed that Jesus

went along with what he was saying, since he did not take out the wineskin and throw it away then and there. Perhaps some day, he would be strong enough to do without it. Andrew wished him well—with, it must be said, a bit of a condescending attitude. Eventually, they made the trek up the hill, and greeted the groom and his new bride, and mingled with the other guests. Andrew was not much good at this; he spent practically all his time in silence in the boat, lest the fish be frightened, and had learned to be around others without saying a word for hours. Answering others with nothing more than a laconic remark, which tended to close down conversations in short order, was the best he seemed able to offer at the moment, and he gradually found himself more or less alone, though surrounded with people who talked around him, with his cup of wine in his hand, merely observing everyone (“as if they were fish,” he thought to himself), and looking and occasionally nodding—he hoped—intelligently when they made a remark in his direction.

About halfway through the festivities, when Andrew was beginning to wonder when the first guests would leave and he could follow suit and be free (and free of the stiffness of his clothes), he happened to be behind Mary and Jesus, and he heard her say, “They have no wine.” Interestingly, Ezra had come over, obviously intending to eavesdrop.

Jesus turned to look at her, with some consternation, and said, “What is that to you, Madam, or to me? My moment has not come yet.”

She looked back, saying nothing with her mouth, but everything with her eyes, and apparently received, if not an answer, at least a kind of permission, and then turned to the

servers, who happened to be standing by. “Do whatever he tells you,” she said.

Jesus stroked his beard, and looked around, pondering what he could do, and then spotted six stone water-jars standing by the wall, fully waist high. He turned to the waiters and said, “Fill the jars with water.”

They looked at each other, and then shrugged in a “Well, why not?” kind of way, and three of them fetched pitchers of water—rather large ones—and went out back to the stream, filled them and after a short time, the water-jars were full to the brim.

“Draw it out now,” said Jesus, “and take it to the one in charge.”

Once again they shrugged, and then their eyes widened as they smelled the “water” they were now taking out of the jars. They brought it over, and when the one overseeing the feast tasted the wine, He asked where they had got it, and when they gestured toward the water-jars, he said, “And he kept it *there? This?*” and immediately beckoned to the groom, who had a look of humiliation on his face. When he came over, he whispered, “Everyone serves his good wine first, and then when people have begun to feel the effects, he uses the poorer quality. But you have kept the good wine until now!” The groom was completely bewildered, and the steward said, “Well, taste it,” and gave him a cup of the wine that the servers had brought over. Now it was the groom’s eyes that widened, and when the steward said, “How much of this do you have?” he looked helplessly at the servers, who answered, “Oh, we have enough, never fear!” and added under their breath with glee, “Enough to supply an army!”

“Well, serve it!” said the steward, and they returned to the water-jars and began filling cups and handing them around. John and Ezra looked at each other.

As the servers began serving the new wine, there arose murmurs of delight among the recipients, who evidently had not yet drunk enough not to be able to tell the difference between what they had been drinking and what they had just been served.

Amazing! Incredible! Fantastic! Impossible! It obviously was water, and now was—apparently excellent—wine. He took a cup just to prove it to himself, and it was superb! Of course, what else would it be if it was miraculous?

Andrew wandered off, saying to himself, “But consider the *influence* that woman has!” It was “not his time,” but at her mere suggestion that there was a problem, she knew that he would do something—because she wished it!—and he performed this spectacular miracle! And at the same time, how inconspicuous it was! Who but the servers really knew of it? True, the rumor was spreading, but most people only knew that a new supply of very, very fine wine had been opened. If it was “not his time,” he had preserved his anonymity. Andrew mused that anyone who heard that he had transformed water into wine would look incredulously at the one who told him, which presumably at this point, was just what Jesus wanted, as he evidently did with Zebedee, whose accident and cure were little remarked.

And here was the spectacular miracle he had all but predicted! He had not really believed that something would happen, and now mere water had become wine! Impossible! And at the least suggestion of his mother—or not even a

suggestion, merely stating a problem—well, and by that suggesting that Jesus supply a solution of some sort. She knew he could do something, and she knew *him*. Of course, if he was somehow the Son of the Supreme Being, then she had also to be the wife of the Supreme Being, and must know the Supreme Being as no one else on earth did.

And the Supreme Being did her bidding! The creature asked her Creator, and the Creator all but obeyed her! No. Took the hint she gave. And neither of them thought that there was anything unusual about it! Even though he apparently had other plans!

Obviously, if one wanted something of Jesus, the one to ask was Mary.

Andrew at this point turned and heard John say, “But behold Thomas.” Here was a new problem, for at that moment, the groom himself came over with a couple of cups of wine, and said, “But you have nothing to drink. We cannot have that. Take this, and I will fetch another one for my—wife.” And he handed it to Thomas, who took it, wondering where Jesus was. From his inconspicuous place, Andrew watched intently. Well, he had told him that he could take it if refusing it meant being insulting. But what was he to do with it?

John said with some alarm, “He looks as if he is going to taste it! Where is Jesus?” And then they both spotted him, almost at the same moment Thomas did; and he was looking straight at Thomas.

Thomas held out the cup a bit, and looked a question.

Jesus nodded, and took a sip of his own wine, which certainly seemed to be permission to drink. He looked a

question at him again, and Jesus again nodded.

“He is actually telling him to drink it!” exclaimed John.

“Something strange is going on,” said Ezra, and began to move in Thomas’s direction. But not before Nathanael had reached him after he had taken a sip and then looked up with the strangest expression on his face, in which surprise, profound disappointment, and relief were mingled.

Nathanael seemed to utter a reproach, not having seen Jesus give permission, when Thomas handed him the cup and said, “Taste it.”

“Oh,” said Nathanael, who blushed and left. Ezra was right behind Nathanael. He said nothing, of course, but merely made himself visible at the edge of Thomas’s sight. Thomas also handed the cup to him, and he too said, “Oh,” and, stifling laughter, faded into the place he had chosen next to John.

“What is it?” asked John.

“What we should have expected. *That* cup was nothing but water.” Another miracle!

“And *now* what?” said Ezra, as he looked over at Mary approaching Thomas. “I think you must excuse me, John, but it looks as if there is something else that I would not like to miss.”

“It rather looks as if they wish to be private, Ezra.”

“They will not mind *me*. No one minds that a slave is standing by.” And he followed them. John looked as if he were going to remonstrate, but after all, Ezra was a free man. And presumably, he could keep a secret; he had plenty of practice as a slave in doing so; and Andrew suspected that if he was not to overhear, either Mary or Jesus would be aware of what was

going on, and would prevent it. But what could Mary have to say to Thomas? Well, it was their business.

Andrew then noticed that John seemed to be growing very nervous, and sure enough, *he* went out. Andrew followed, wondering whether he was going to follow Ezra, who was following Mary and Thomas; but no, he simply found a bench by himself, and sat and contemplated the sky and the very beautiful garden, with insects buzzing around the flowers. It kept him spellbound for a considerable time. Andrew was fascinated, and, with nothing else to do (he hated these chitchats one had to engage in, and supposed John was the same) he stood there looking at him until James found him, and said, "You are all right? I have been looking for you, wondering what happened to you."

"Oh, I am fine—now," said John. "You know how I cannot stand these gatherings. It simply became too much for me, and I found a place where I could be by myself."

"I was hoping that was what it was. But you know how you are. Either you go away and deflate, as it were, or you become more and more frantic and are apt to start a fistfight."

"I know. I did not want that to happen. Especially after everything else had worked out so favorably."

"Then all is well?" And John briefly explained what he had seen. James did not know of it. Toward the end, aware that John still needed time by himself, he remarked, "I expect people will be taking their leave soon."

"I will join you shortly. I am almost back to my normal self."

"Very well." And he left.

That was interesting. Apparently John was worse than

most people who kept to themselves; the very fact of being in a social group seemed to overwhelm him. Andrew made a mental note of this, to help John withdraw in the future if he needed to. Of course, James was likely to spot it first.

But, thank the Master, it was time to go. Andrew waited until several people had taken their leave, so that he would not seem to be rushing away—and besides, the wine *was* excellent—and then went up to the groom and bride and congratulated them once again, and then excused himself and walked out, rather stiffly because of the tunic, starting down the hill to his house, where he could change his clothes! back to something comfortable. Simon, he knew, would be one of the last to leave, so he did not even look to see him for another hour or two.

Twelve

The next day, they began forming themselves into a semi-nomadic company, with provisions for cooking their own food and tents for shelter outside.

It seemed that this was to be their normal condition from now on, rather than imposing constantly on the hospitality of those in Capernaum. They would need all this, of course, on the trip to Jerusalem, which they planned to take along the valley of the Jordan river this time, rather than going directly through Samaria.

Several others had joined them also, including a number of women, who occupied themselves with the material needs of the group. Ezra became a kind of liaison between the men and the women, since he had taken care of the domestic duties with Nathanael when they had lived together in the “cottage” beside his father’s mansion.

As they walked down the green shore of the Jordan river with, farther south to Beit Shean and beyond, the mountains on either side turning into nothing but huge mounds of brownish-gray dirt, Andrew began drawing apart from the rest

and musing on what had happened so far, and speculating on what was to happen next. First of all, there was the catch of fish—which one might think was coincidence, if one had not been warned by the voice of the thunder—and if it had not been immediately followed by the cure of Zebedee, and the apparent “arrangement” of events so that he would suddenly be at death’s door. *That*, when one thought about it, was probably more frightening than the cure! It definitely implied that he had control of things—of everything!—and was “arranging” things according to some plan he had.

On the other hand, it meant that he *was* in charge, and if one coupled that with the fact that he was treating these insects he had asked to follow him as if they were friends, it was supremely reassuring, was it not? Andrew, who was given to worrying, now realized that he had nothing whatever to worry about. Of course, it was easy to say that. Now he had the fact that he was in the company of the Supreme Being who seemed to be just a man. How did one deal with it?

Certainly his mother had learned not to worry. Consider what happened at the feast. The interesting thing was that, though the miracle was in itself a spectacular feat—it is simply not possible for water to turn into wine—Jesus made it happen with no fuss or fanfare, not even commanding the water to do anything. After his mother had done nothing but present him with a challenge (he stroked his beard for a few moments), he simply told the servers to fill the jars with water and take it out, and it had become superb wine. Anyone who was not paying particular attention would not even realize that there was anything unusual (except perhaps storing the wine in the jars that people normally washed in)—which was consistent with

Jesus's statement to his mother that it was "not his time yet." It was all perfectly "arranged," even if it was something he had presumably not planned beforehand.

And it proved rather conclusively in Andrew's mind that he was the Son of Thunder, the beloved in whom his father was well pleased—whatever that would turn out to mean, ultimately. Who else could have done it? Even Elijah would have had to go through a whole rigamarole imploring the Master to change the water, as he done when he asked to bring fire down from the sky on the sacrifice.

And it also showed that his mother was perfectly aware of what he was—as how could she not be, if he had been born from her? What must it have been like for her and Joseph, rearing him? Giving orders to the Almighty—or to what was all but the same thing as the Almighty, whatever that meant! And knowing that that was what one was doing! It boggled the mind! Yet on the surface she and her son were simply ordinary people. Andrew wondered how his townsfolk in Nazareth would react to his suddenly showing himself to be a wonder-worker. He had said that he was going to begin removing his disguise, or some such words; so evidently he had not shown his true self as yet.

And what would things be like when his time *did* come? If he could turn water into wine, why could he not transform tigers into animals that ate hay and cavorted with rabbits? And destroy death and sickness and suffering? If what Andrew had seen up to now had actually happened, it was certainly possible. Anything was possible! And Andrew was to be a part of it, however little prepared he was for doing anything of the sort!

He did not know whether his heart was beating so fast

from excited anticipation or from fear.

Eventually, south of Jericho, they began climbing up and up the desert mountains of bare dirt, and finally topped them to the west, and found vegetation once again, punctuated by those exclamation points of cypress trees that seemed to say, “See what the Lord up there can do!” Andrew all but heard them shout. What indeed would the Lord up there—and down here—do?

At the gate entering Jerusalem, Jesus encountered a number of sick and lame beggars, whom, in lieu of supplying with money, he cured with as little fanfare as he had cured Zebedee and transformed the wine, simply by touching them. They gasped in astonishment and glee, and ran off—literally, in some cases, especially those who had been crippled—to announce their good fortune to all and sundry.

The result, of course, was predictable: As soon as the people heard of this, he was inundated with the sick, whom he touched and healed. They all shook their heads in wonderment, not only at the cures themselves, but even more at the casual way in which they were done, as if Jesus regarded this as simply the equivalent of giving alms. Andrew wondered, however, if it were that simple. Was he curing them because they needed to be cured, or was this part of another “arrangement”? Well, he would see.

Before long, they went into the immense Temple, with its vast courtyards teeming with people, full of the noise of their conversation and of the bleating of sheep and the lowing of calves to be sold to those who wished to make a sacrifice.

Jesus stopped, all but shaking off those who were pressing around him hoping for a cure—his look made it clear that he

wished to be undisturbed, at least for a while. He looked around at the vendors and at the money-changers, stroked his beard as if thinking, and suddenly came to a decision. He undid the cord that bound his waist. "John, lend me your cincture, would you?" he said, with fire in his eyes. The ends of the cords were tied into knots to keep them from fraying, and he doubled the ropes over in his hands into what was a kind of whip with four tails, which he began swinging before him.

"Out! Out!" he shouted, beating the animals on their rumps, making them bellow and run off. "Out!" He came to the money-changers' tables, where Roman denarii were converted into shekels to pay for the sacrifices, and suddenly kicked them over. "It is written," he cried, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' and you have made it a den of thieves!" The money-changers screamed at him as they dashed to pick up the coins that were flying and bouncing all over the pavement.

"Take those out of here!" he cried to the pigeon-vendors, "You are not to make my Father's house a market!" The vendors fled from their tables, grabbing their cages of pigeons, grateful that they had escaped his wrath without having the birds fly off away from them. The sellers of the other animals meanwhile were chasing their cattle, trying to round them up and take them out of the Temple as quickly as they could. Confusion was everywhere, animals braying, bleating, and bellowing, people yelling, the sick pleading, pigeons flapping their wings explosively in their cages, hooves clattering on the tiles, coins jingling still on the pavement, and vendors scurrying everywhere.

So even though Jesus seemed to be reacting to the

scandalous situation, perhaps it was part of the “arrangement.” He had prepared the people that he was more than just another person by his miraculous cures of so many of them, and now he was showing them that this was “my Father’s house.” The thunder had said, “This is my beloved son,” and now *he* was saying that the Temple of the Master was “my Father’s house,” and showing in no uncertain terms that he would not tolerate its desecration.

What better way to show who he was?

And it was interesting that he did not open the pigeon-vendors’ cages and let the birds fly off, because the vendors would not be able to retrieve them as the sellers of cattle and sheep and the money-changers could, even if with difficulty. He was rebuking them, but not destroying them, despite their sin. Even in his wrath, he was gentle. It gave one hope, did it not?

Eventually, things quieted down somewhat, as the animals left the Temple and the money-changers had retrieved most of their coins (not without considerable argument among them about whose was what). Everyone had been cowed by Jesus’s forcefulness, but some began to gather round him to protest.

“Where is your authorization to do something like this?” a man shouted from the crowd, which kept a respectful distance away from Jesus’s whip. It was a legitimate question, thought Andrew; and it deserved an answer.

Jesus, panting from his exertion, looked round at them with scorn. He switched the whip to his left hand, and then with his right, beat his breast with his fingers, “Destroy this temple,” he shouted, and flung out the hand in front of him with three fingers raised. “and in three days I will rebuild it!”

No one said anything for a few moments; his reply was so far from an answer that they were stunned, trying to fathom it. Finally someone laughed mockingly and said, “This temple has take forty-six years to build, and you will build it in three days?”

Jesus gave no further answer, however, and looked around at them, still full of wrath. Finally, he walked across the courtyard, now cleared of animals and money-changers, and went from the Courtyard of the Gentiles into that of the Judeans, the Temple proper, where he stood silently for a while to pray. The students followed. But the people themselves gave him a wide berth.

“Who is he?” they were saying among themselves. “Who does he think he is? Is he pretending to be the Prince?” Some answered, “Had you not heard? He is the one who was curing all sorts of diseases, merely by touching people.” “And so?” was the reply. “And so, perhaps he *is* the Prince. He certainly acts as if he is!”

So Jesus had made his point. Who but the Prince—who but the Son of the Almighty?—had the authority to cleanse the Temple thus? And the people recognized it, in an inchoate way. It was an unconventional method of showing who he was, but it had the proper effect, if one was to believe the reaction of the crowd.

But Jesus gave no indication that he put any trust in the faith of those who were positively disposed; it was too early, and too little had happened, and besides, no one knew what his plans were if he really was the Prince. Everyone was already buzzing about an overthrow of the Romans, which Simon the Revolutionary was busy to suggest. But Jesus himself made no

further step.

Andrew wondered what Judas's reaction would be. This was hardly the diplomatic way that Judas had counseled; if anything, it would antagonize the people in authority—the very people who should have kept the Temple clean of buying and selling, and who doubtless knew they should, but who profited by the scandal, probably justifying it in some convoluted way, as Pharisees were trained to do. That was probably why John, the soul of honesty, was not favorably disposed toward them.

But no, Judas would not be pleased, and probably would not have noticed that Jesus had established himself in the minds of ordinary people as not only a miracle-worker, but one who had concern over “my Father's house.” It was but a start, but it *was* a start. It was, when one thought on it, brilliantly “arranged,” for all its apparent spontaneity.

The others in Jesus's group, of course, were discussing among themselves what had happened, but apart from Jesus so as not to disturb his prayer. Andrew payed little attention, lost in his own thoughts, but then they began speculating about what Jesus meant by “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will rebuild it,” and what they were saying entered his consciousness vaguely, because he too did not understand it.

He gathered that they seemed to reach the conclusion that the Temple he was referring to was his body, not the place he was in, but that seemed to mean that if they killed him, he would come back to life in three days.

Andrew, as he thought, seemed inclined to agree that this was the most likely interpretation of what Jesus meant. He saw that what he was doing would raise opposition, and opposition

from the most powerful among the Judeans; and they would have no compunction about killing any upstart who got in their way.

Jesus was not predicting, by any means, that this *would* happen, but he was warning anyone who had in mind getting rid of him that if they tried, they would not ultimately be successful. Even if they killed him, he would return, is what he seemed to be saying.

But could he not prevent himself from being killed? Perhaps if it were the will of the people as a whole through their representatives, he would not choose to do so. If they did not accept him as the Prince, then this would be a crime they would probably have to answer for. And it *might*, it just *might*, involve killing him.

But *if* they did, he was telling them, he would “rebuild the Temple” in three days. Just as Jonah was apparently dead in the fish for three days and then returned? Still, it was a severe worry for Andrew, who laughed to himself when he remembered that in the company of Jesus he had nothing to worry about. But if Jesus were killed? . . .

But perhaps he was making too much of this. It may have had a more literal meaning connected with the Temple itself. Presumably, as time went on, things would become clearer, including the meaning of this enigma.

It was toward evening when Jesus emerged from his meditation, and he gathered them and said, “We will spend the nights here in a place I know of across the Valley of the Kidron Brook, on the Mount of Olives.” and they started down the hill toward the east, when a man came up to Jesus and said that Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, would like to see him

that evening.

“Indeed?” said Jesus. “This is not an arrest for my audacity, I trust.” So they had caught the implication in Jesus’s calling the Temple “my Father’s house.” And clearly Jesus had expected something like this.

The messenger was saying, “—merely would like to see what you have to say.”

“Simon,” Jesus said to Andrew’s brother, “Do you remember the garden where we stayed once when we were in Jerusalem? That is where we will be going. I will come to you later, after I have had a talk with this Nicodemus. —And it might be as well,”

he added, “if we kept this destination to ourselves. We might need a place later on to go where no one could find us. Do you understand?”

“I do, Master,” said Simon, who was as much in the dark about what he meant as everyone else.

Jesus then followed the messenger, and Simon led them to the east, up the hill from the Kidron Valley, as the sun began to sink over the Great Sea, finally becoming a huge red half-sun on the horizon, turning the sky orange and green, with a few clouds red and purple around it.

So there was someone in authority who “merely would like to see what you have to say.” There was at least one open mind there, and so Jesus had not alienated all of the important people.

Andrew, with few comments, went into the garden with Simon, who had also been made unusually quiet by what had happened, and they walked among the old, gnarled olive trees and found a fairly comfortable spot, where they lay down,

covered by their cloaks against the cold, and slept.

The full Passover moon had risen and brightened the little grove when Jesus appeared among them and lay down next to Simon and Andrew. “The seed, it appears,” he whispered to Simon, “has been planted. It is not what I would have planned, but it will do; it will do.” So even what he had not planned was somehow “arranged.”

After celebrating the Passover the next evening at the house of a friend of Jesus in Jerusalem, they went to the banks of the Jordan, where Jesus instructed them to bathe the people who were coming to him.

“Do you know that John is still bathing people, over at Aenon?” asked Andrew. “Someone I bathed just told me. He said he wanted to come here also.”

“It is well,” said Jesus. “We are not rivals.”

But others who came reported that the Pharisees were beginning to notice that Jesus’s followers, who were, of course, more numerous, were bathing more people than John was, and that Jesus was becoming more prominent, because in addition to bathing people, Jesus was curing various diseases among them.

“You are making them nervous,” said Judas Iscariot. “And it might not be wise, think you not, not to make them nervous at this early stage?”

“I agree,” said Jesus. “We should return to Galilee and there begin seriously announcing the advent of the Kingdom.”

Thirteen

So they left, but instead of going along the Jordan, they went straight through Samaria. They had reached Sychar, near Jacob's well, around noon on the second day, and Jesus said, "You go into the town to buy food. I will rest a bit beside the well here. We might stay here a night or two."

"Here? In Samaria?"

"Fear not; we will be perfectly safe. Now go."

When they returned, they found Jesus talking with a woman, who had come to the well to draw water. They were astonished, not only that he was speaking alone with a woman, something that was not done, but with a Samaritan, who in general hated the Judeans.

But before they arrived, she took one look at them as they came up and ran off, leaving her water-jar.

While they were preparing the midday meal, Jesus paced up and down, clearly excited. "Rabbi, eat something," said James, John's brother.

"I have food to eat you know nothing of," answered Jesus, continuing to pace.

“Did she give him something to eat?” they asked each other, and he stopped and looked at them. “My food,” he said, “is to do the will of the one who sent me, and finish the task he has given me.” He looked out at the fields, where the crops were beginning to sprout. “You would say, would you not, that it will be four months before the harvest?”

He waved his hand at the landscape, “But I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields; they are already ripe for the harvest, and already the reaper has begun collecting his pay and is gathering a crop for eternal life, so that the one who planted the crop will be just as happy as the one gathering it in!”

The others looked at him in bewilderment; the fields had barely begun to turn green. “I am sending you,” he said to them, “to reap what you have not worked on; others have done the work, and you will gather the fruits.”

Before they could ask him what he meant, the woman reappeared with a number of the townsfolk, some of whom the students had seen when they bought food. They begged him to stay and tell them more of what he had told the woman; and they stayed in that place two days. It seemed that Jesus had told her that he was the Prince, and also mentioned “everything that I have done,” which was apparently not a catalogue of virtues. Andrew noted with amusement that Ezra had ingratiated himself with the townspeople, especially the woman, and had given a full report to John of what had happened. Apparently, his foreign appearance had made them better disposed toward him.

When they returned to Galilee, Jesus made for his home town of Nazareth, down the hill from Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. As he entered the region, everyone

welcomed him, because they had been at the feast in Jerusalem and had seen his cures and the cleansing of the Temple, and had heard of cures he had made at various times in Capernaum. Some were agog at his ability to cure people, and others were overjoyed at how he had tweaked the noses of the Judeans, who did not dare, really, to denounce him, since everyone knew that what he had done is what had been crying out to be done for years.

Shortly after dawn the next day, Jesus entered the synagogue, where the men had gathered to pray. The students stood at the back, and Jesus went up to the front, and the rabbi, seeing him, asked him if he would speak. He requested the scroll of Isaiah, which he unrolled until he found the place he wished.

“We have as a guest today,” said the rabbi, “Jesus, someone doubtless all of you know.” Then Jesus began to read, to the astonishment of practically everyone, who knew him only as a carpenter, and had assumed he was illiterate: “The Master’s spirit is upon me,” he said, “and this is why he has anointed me to report the good news to the poor. He has given me a proclamation to deliver: one of freedom for prisoners of war, of new sight for the blind; he has told me to set broken people free and announce a year of the Master’s favor.”

It went through Andrew as a shock that this was a prophesy about Jesus himself, and that he was probably just about to announce a year of the Master’s favor. Andrew’s heart began to beat fast with excitement.

And sure enough, Jesus rolled up the scroll and handed it to the attendant, and sat back down, with every eye in the

synagogue fastened upon him. "Today," he began, "that passage is being fulfilled as you listen to it."

Andrew had noticed in a vague kind of way that when Jesus said, "set broken people free" he had looked up from the scroll at a rather filthy man in the back, who certainly seemed "broken." He looked again at him during the pause while what he was saying was beginning to sink in. The man did not seem to be aware of his eyes on him; he was too embarrassed.

As the people began to react, someone whispered, "What is he trying to say?"

"Evidently," was the whispered answer, "he thinks that he is the Master's Anointed."

"Who, that man? But is he not the Jesus who is Joseph's son? The carpenter? What is he doing here acting like a rabbi?"

"Acting like a rabbi! He is acting as if he were the Prince who was prophesied to become David's successor!"

"Does he think we know him not? We know his father and mother and all his relatives! Why, he has lived here his whole life! Does he expect us to believe he suddenly came down from heaven or something?"

But then others began recounting what had happened in Jerusalem and Capernaum, and the murmuring grew louder, as disputes arose in the congregation. Jesus lifted up his hand, and said, mildly, but in a voice that could clearly be heard through the whole synagogue, "I know. You are all quoting me the proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself. Do here in your own town what we have heard you do in Capernaum.'"

A few who had heard nothing about Capernaum whispered, "What? Has he done something in Capernaum?"

"They say he has cured many of all kinds of diseases,

and how? Has he discovered some new medicine?"

"No, he does it with a mere word, they say."

"Nonsense!"
 "accepted in his own land," Jesus was saying. "There were many, many widows in Israel during Elijah's time—this is true, what I am saying—when the sky was shut for three years and six months, and a great famine spread through the whole country. But Elijah was not sent to any one of them; he went to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. And there were many lepers in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha; but it was Naaman the Syrian, not one of them, who was cured."

Andrew cringed. Jesus was obviously not trying to ingratiate himself diplomatically. Doubtless he knew that the people, who had seen him for close to thirty years, would find it impossible to believe that he was anything but the carpenter, who suddenly had delusions of grandeur. He was giving them a chance to "change their way of thinking" and believe in him, but he realized from the outset that it was hopeless. Andrew looked over at the "broken man," who seemed to be trying to escape, but others were blocking the entrance, and he could not do it without calling attention to himself.

When the people realized the rebuke Jesus had delivered, Andrew heard, "Do you hear that?" from someone.

Another answered, "He is as much as saying that we are not worthy of his consideration!"

"Who does he think he is?"

"Well I will *show* him who he *really* is!" And the crowd, suddenly enraged, surged forward, grasping Jesus, pulling him out of the building, and clearly intending to take him to the cliff outside the town to throw him over.

But suddenly, everyone began milling about. "Where is

he?” everyone was saying. “Who had him?” “He was here but a moment since!” “Who let him go?” They were all furious in their frustration, but it gradually dawned on them that there was nothing to be done. Jesus was simply not there. They began to disperse, shaking their heads.

As they went out, Andrew saw the “broken man” leave and slip behind a bush, with Ezra inconspicuously following him. The two disappeared for a while, and shortly afterward, Ezra returned, to Thomas, shaking his head.

“Who was that man?” asked Thomas, and Ezra answered, “I know not. But something strange is going on. I was about to follow him, and then—rather like the Master—he was nowhere. Has the Master returned?”

“No, he—”
“I expect it would be well to go down to Capernaum for the night,” said Jesus, as if he had been with them and were resuming a conversation. Andrew stared. He had been looking right at them, and there was no Jesus there, and then he was with them, as if he had never left. “I have an errand to do in that vicinity tomorrow evening, and we can find places there to stay with no trouble. It seems I am not welcome here.”

James expostulated violently, denouncing the Nazarenes, but Jesus cut him off with, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country and among his relatives. I expected this, but it needed to be confirmed,” and then Jesus, acting as if nothing unusual had happened, gathered his group of followers and led them to the place they had been earlier, by the lake. And interestingly, no one else noticed them at all—any of them. Could he make whole groups disappear? He apparently made the “broken man” disappear with him. And where was that man now? And who was he? And what had he

to do with Jesus, or Jesus with him?

Evidently, thought Andrew, as he went back to pondering the whole incident, Jesus had felt he had to give his townsfolk a chance to begin, at least, to believe in him, even though he knew that he would not succeed. Would it be the same with those in Judea? Well, there was that Nicodemus, at least, as doubtless there were some in Nazareth. The master of the synagogue seemed to have some faith in him, or he would never have invited him to read.

But the important thing was what this meant for Jesus's mission. Was his mission to restore the state before Adam, or was it to give his chosen people the *chance to accept* his restoration of the "natural" condition of mankind, without death and suffering? And if so, could he convince them that this was possible, or would they reject the opportunity? What a tragedy for mankind! A second fall! And if they did reject him—which to Andrew seemed likely—what would happen at this second fall of mankind?

It was not to be thought of. Andrew tried to put it out of his mind. He directed his attention to the others.

The students were still talking indignantly of the reception he had received, but it did not seem to bother Jesus; he had, as he said to James, confirmed what he had expected. "It goes to show," remarked Nathanael, "that it is not going to be all that easy to inaugurate the Reign of God in Galilee either. Cures are fine, and perhaps signs of the new state of affairs; but even those impressed by them care about them as cures, not signs."

That whole day and the next passed in discussions that went nowhere, and in Jesus's touching and curing a growing number of people who came to him for relief. Toward evening,

Jesus went with his students up to a river ford, at which there was a tax-collector's booth, where a man—the “broken man!” who looked even more broken than ever, if that were possible—was assessing the tax on the loads the farmers wished to transport, and his assistants were looking on with a mixture of horror and disbelief. He looked as if he was about to give up in complete despair, and went into the booth, taking something in his hand.

Jesus walked up and said, “Come. Follow me,” and the man, who was evidently fighting within himself, after a few moments put whatever it was onto a shelf in his booth. He looked back at it, as if wondering whether he was doing the right thing in not using it. But he turned and walked toward Jesus.

So the “broken man” was a tax-collector, one of those most hated by any Judean, not least those he forced (with the help of the soldier who was nearby) into paying not only what was owed to Rome, but whatever extra he could extort from the poor farmers and tradespeople!

But if he was a tax-collector, he was not merely a “broken” tax-collector, but a completely shattered tax-collector. And Jesus wanted him to follow him! But this was a bit much, thought Andrew. He was reminded of the saying that a man was known by the company he keeps, and Jesus not only consorted with the lower classes such as fishermen, but had a notorious drunk in his retinue, and was about to add a *tax-collector* to it!

And Andrew was willing to wager that this tax-collector was the one Jesus was waiting for to add to the “nucleus” he was forming!

—Of course, if a man was known by the company he keeps, then that worked both ways. Presumably, if this man joined Jesus, *he* would be known by the one in whose company he was, because it was obvious that he was now an *ex*-tax-collector, just as Thomas was an *ex*-drunk. But still . . .

The soldier standing by, along with the two assistants, came up to the man, and Jesus said to the soldier, “This man has decided to become a student of mine, and will no longer be working here. You will let him go, and you may tell his—friend—that he will soon be glad to have eyes and ears in the company of Jesus of Nazareth. The name is not unknown in Judea, even now.”

“I will be required to confirm that.” said the soldier.

“I and my followers will not be difficult to find. If you need to locate Levi, you will have no trouble.” Levi, thought Andrew.

“You are leaving us, Master?” said one of the assistants, and the man, who had almost started to go back to the booth, turned instead to him and said, “No. Yes. . . .Yes. I have decided to follow this man and learn from him.” Then, apparently now that the decision had been made, he continued with less confusion in his voice, “You know how to carry on what we have been doing. Use today’s numbers as a guide to what Rome exacts, and add enough to earn your own keep. You will have no trouble. But be not too exacting.”

Both men reacted with astonishment, apparently at the last phrase more than anything else. “But you cannot simply leave us!” said the one who had spoken.

He made no reply, and turned to follow after Jesus, who had confidently walked away, as if everything had been settled

satisfactorily. The others kept expostulating, but it was as if Levi could not hear. The soldier followed for a step or two, as if he would object, and then shrugged his shoulders, and began speaking to the two assistants.

Philip came up to Thomas, and whispered, "Was he not in the synagogue this morning?" Thomas prudently replied, "I know not. The synagogue?" Andrew was convinced that he was indeed the "broken man," but it was probably a good idea not to advertise it, especially since he had apparently disappeared with Jesus earlier. What was it that happened?

Jesus was saying, "—must sleep first. And perhaps think a bit on the morrow. We will take you home and then return for you, if you keep to your intention. I should tell you that the soldier will also return. He finds it difficult to believe that you will abandon your life."

"I cannot go back. I cannot."

"But you must assure yourself that this is not simply fatigue speaking. When you are fresh, it is possible you will see things in a different light."

"*You* should know I will not."

"Perhaps. But it is you who should be assured of it above all."

"Whatever you say. I know not even who I am now—or what. I know nothing."

His attitude seemed to imply that he knew Jesus. Had Jesus worked for him at one time? Perhaps as a carpenter?

None of the group, of course, made any attempt to speak to the tax-collector, and were murmuring softly among themselves; they were too stunned at this development. Tax-collectors were far worse than Samaritans, and "Samaritan" was

often used by the Judeans as a curse, when they needed the worst insult they could make about someone. And now a tax-collector was to be one of them! An agent of Rome!

And who was this “friend” who needed to know about them? Someone in Judea, no less. Pontius Pilate? Was Jesus actually *inviting* a spy into their midst?

Jesus kept him by his side, gently supporting him as he stumbled along the seemingly interminable distance to his house, a sumptuous Roman-style villa (which caused even more remarks) with a fence around it and vicious dogs patrolling inside. No one dared to say anything openly, but it was clear what everyone was thinking. A drunk—at least, a former drunk—was one thing, but a traitor to the Judean people quite another, not to mention someone who bled the last drop from the people for his own gain in addition to Rome’s!

The man made some request of Jesus which no one heard; but Jesus stroked his beard and gave what seemed to be an affirmative answer.

After they left him, discussions kept going on in low tones among the students, while Jesus acted—of course—as if nothing unusual had happened.

Fourteen

When they began to go into the field to take their rest for the night, as had become their custom, Andrew heard Jesus say, as he had expected, “I believe that we now will have the nucleus I was waiting for. We will see.”

Andrew thought for a moment, and concluded that this was consistent with his theory that Jesus did not choose his immediate followers for the qualities they could bring to his enterprise of changing the way the world thought, but because they were specially needy and required his keeping close watch on them. And that once again made Andrew wonder what it was about him that needed Jesus’s supervision. Clearly, it was not some obvious sin, like drunkenness or tax-collecting, or even Nathanael’s laziness (or perhaps cowardice). Was it something he had to learn that Jesus would have to take care to explain?

All he really wanted was a world where justice prevailed, and people were treated fairly. What could be wrong with that? Perhaps he did not have a correct notion of fairness. What else could it be, if he had to be taught something?

In any case, Jesus's statement that this Levi was going to be part of the nucleus raised eyebrows among the group. That a tax-collector, of all people, would not only be one of them, but part of the nucleus, whatever it was, was going to take even more getting used to. Practically everyone was profoundly shocked—except, interestingly, young John, who also seemed to have been expecting this. He would have to sound him out on the subject some day.

The next day, however, when they went in the morning to see Levi, his slave came out and told them that he was still asleep, that he had been exhausted from the previous two days when he had had no sleep, and that he did not feel it right to wake him. Jesus seemed to be expecting it, and agreed to return on the morrow.

As they left, they noticed that the soldier also appeared, and, receiving the same message, reported something to the slave. Permission from higher authority? The “friend”?

So there would be a kind of spy among them. Of course, what had Jesus to hide? If he could overcome the difficulty of Roman occupation somehow, then doubtless he could do it in the open. Who knew? Perhaps he could change their way of thinking as well as that of the Judeans. If the whole world were to enter a new phase with lions lying down with lambs, then why not?

Of course, the little matter of the “friend” was not lost on Simon the Revolutionary, who expostulated at considerable length on the topic, certain that he was Pilate himself. He said to John that Jesus was “putting the whole enterprise in danger.”

“If,” answered John, “the ‘whole enterprise’ means rising

up militarily against Rome.”

“Well, what else could it be? The ‘reign of God,’ after all.”

“A thousand things. But what would you, Simon? Would you prefer that there be a spy in our midst who (a) is known to be a spy, and (b) looks very much as if he is going to be loyal to us, or would you have one whom no one is aware of?”

“I would prefer to have none at all!”

“Of a certainty. But the question is whether *Pontius Pilate* would prefer that, as long as you have brought him up.”

“His preferences are not worth a copper to me.”

“Perhaps not, but he has been known to act upon his ‘preferences.’ And the type of spy he would select, if he were selecting one, would in my opinion likely be someone like yourself, who gave every appearance of being against him to disarm us.”

“Are you accusing me of being a spy for Rome?”

John was about to make a hot reply, but at this point, Nathanael broke in, “Not at all, Simon. But John has a point. *If* Rome is interested in finding out what is going on among us (and I suspect they have more than a passing interest with the talk of the Reign of God), then we can live much more comfortably knowing who their liaison is than not.”

Andrew was of two minds about Levi. Presumably his sins were (or would be) forgiven, but he had a great deal to answer for. The question was what he would have to do to make amends for the damage he had wrought—and it had to be considerable—enormous. Who knows if people had committed suicide because he had taken away their last mite? As to whether he would be a spy for Pontius Pilate or not (supposing the “friend” to be Pilate), this did not bother Andrew a jot.

Jesus doubtless knew everything that Levi would say, and could prevent whatever he wanted. He even seemed to know who the “friend” was, based on his response to the soldier. No, there was nothing to concern oneself with on that score.

But Andrew had the suspicion that how Levi would be treated by Jesus was going to test his notion of fairness. *Would* Jesus be fair to Levi’s victims as well as to him, and how? He almost conceived the idea that if Levi did not have to make restitution (as he suspected he would not), he would have to disagree with Jesus’s treatment of him—and then caught himself before he actually passed judgment on the Almighty. “I do not understand,” he said in anticipation of what he was sure would happen.

The next day they returned, and Levi hobbled out, obviously still the worse for wear, and spoke sharply to the dogs, which only reluctantly gave up their desire to feast on the students, and returned growling to the back of the house while he approached the gate.

“You have returned to life on the third day, I see,” said Jesus. Third day? Did not Jesus say something about “three days”? Ah. “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will rebuild it.” Coincidence?

“If one can call it ‘life,’” returned Levi. “I am as dead as I am alive.”

“Ah, well, your new life is barely born, and you are still feeling the pains of the birth canal.”

“I am feeling pains, truly,” he returned.

“Do you still wish to follow me and learn from me?”

“I cannot see that I have any alternative. I am totally at a loss. I know not what you are; you are certainly not the one I

once thought you to be. But you seemed to be saying that you could put back the pieces of me that have been scattered all over the ground.” Again, hints that Levi knew Jesus previously.

“Well, perhaps not put them back,” Jesus was answering. “The self that you were is not something you are proud of and would have restored, is it not?”

“There is wisdom in that.”

“That is why I said a new life has been born, if you would choose to live it. It is your choice, however.”

“As I say, what choice do I have? I cannot go back, and I see no way forward. What would a tax-collector who renounced tax-collecting do? How would I live?”

“Well, you can try what I have to offer, and we will see.”

“What I cannot understand is what possible use *you* could have for me, given what I am, in whatever it is you are doing.”

“Ah, well if it comes to that, there are many things you could be useful for. You can read and write well, in several languages, and we know your skill with money. But that is beside the point, really. The point really is what can be done for a sheep that wandered off as a lamb and has fallen among wolves. The others, here, of course, are not quite convinced as yet that you are not really a wolf. They will learn.”

Andrew noticed that Jesus was confirming his idea of why Jesus chose people. True, he admitted that Levi could be useful for his knowledge of languages and accounts, but, as he said, that was not really the point. The point evidently was that he had fallen into sin, and Jesus wanted to pull him out.

And his victims? What of them? Nothing, as he had expected.

“—find me not a very good companion in any case.”

Matthew was saying. “I have been alone most of my life, and have forgotten how to act with others. Even my slave and I barely speak. I hope they will be able to make allowances, not only for what I was, but for what I am.”

“It will be good for them, fear not.” And as he took him over to the group, which had gathered a little apart, murmuring to each other, to introduce him, Andrew was wondering whether he would be able to “make allowances” for all the people Levi had fleeced. It would be difficult, to say the least.

Jesus then said, “Let us proceed to the house, and I think it would be useful as we go if I told you a little story. I tell this just to you and not the crowds at the moment.

“Two men once went into the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and one a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood there and whispered this prayer: ‘My God, I am grateful to you for not being greedy, dishonest, and adulterous like other people—or even like this tax collector.’”

Andrew reacted with a shock. It was obviously a story about Levi, the “broken man” of the synagogue, and another person, who was virtuous. It was as if the story was directed at him.

Andrew noticed that Levi understood the story to involve himself. *Had* there been another man—presumably a Pharisee—in the synagogue that morning, up at the front? He could not remember. Of course, Jesus had set the story in the Temple, not a synagogue—but that was of no consequence, Andrew thought.

Jesus was continuing, “—a week, and I pay my tithes on everything I own.’ The tax-collector, however, stood in the

back of the Temple and would not even raise his eyes to heaven; he only kept beating his breast and saying, ‘My God, please have mercy on this sinner!’

Levi turned pale, and Andrew concluded that indeed Jesus was talking about him. What great sin had brought him into the synagogue that morning? Doubtless he had never set foot in the place before. How would he dare? Those around him would seize him and throw him off the cliff, as they had tried to do with Jesus.

“—point is,” Jesus continued following his custom of acting as if nothing was happening, “that he was the one who left the Temple virtuous, not the Pharisee. Everyone who elevates himself will be lowered, and one who lowers himself will be elevated.”

Andrew took in his breath. He knew it. He left the Temple *virtuous*, in spite of all his sins! And the Pharisee, who had done no wrong, did not! If this was the world of the Kingdom, the world of the Kingdom was upside down! In his outrage, he almost blurted his famous, “It is not *fair!*” but caught himself in time and managed to say to himself, “I do not understand!”

There was a silence. The paleness suddenly left Levi’s face, and it flamed crimson. And then he noticed everyone looking at him. The group had not had Jesus tell them a story before, and its obvious application to Levi was evidently supposed to indicate to them what their attitude toward him should be. But how could one simply erase a lifetime of such damage to others by beating his breast and saying he was sorry? There *had* to be more to it! But what?

James the Owl came up to Levi and asked, “Were you

(hem) ever in the Temple, Levi?”

“Call me Matthew, please. That is the name I was born with, and I now no longer have to disguise it. The one I wished to avoid now knows who and where I am. No, I was never in the Temple. It is a story. You must ask him if it applies to me, and how, if at all.”

No one was fooled by this, of course, and everyone, Andrew saw, took it to signify that Jesus was telling them that he had left the synagogue with his sins, whatever they were, forgiven.

Of course, Jesus did not exactly say that *he* forgave the man’s sins, but that the man’s attitude induced God—or better “allowed” God, who “did not want the death of the sinner but his repentance”—to forgive him. Still, Jesus was clearly indicating that Levi was now virtuous; and if he was “the beloved Son” of the Almighty, then this was now the fact, hard as it was to accept.

Clearly this Levi—Matthew—was struggling with the same concept. Finally, it seemed to occur to him that if it *were* possible, perhaps a new life could begin, after all.

Philip, who could not let go of an idea, came up to him at this point, and said, “Did I not see you in the synagogue in Nazareth, a couple of mornings ago?”

“I have been in that synagogue but once in my life.”

“Oh. I thought I saw you when—but it is of no consequence.” Andrew saw through this. A couple of mornings ago was the “once in his life” that he had been there.

Andrew, as they walked along, was beside Nathanael. He turned to him and said, “But I do not understand the story at all,” he said. “It makes no sense.”

“Why do you say that?” asked Nathanael.

“Well, he said the Pharisee did not leave the Temple virtuous, and he did nothing wrong, and in fact did any number of virtuous things. And the tax-collector” he looked around to see if Matthew was nearby, but missed seeing him “was not only a sinner, but admitted that he was.”

“But he was sorry for it.”

“Well, what of that? He *did* nothing about it. If I murder someone and then say I am sorry, does it bring him back to life? What of his wife and children? How am I exonerated by saying that I am sorry?”

“Spoken like a virtuous man, Andrew. I have a suspicion that in the Reign of God, things are not going to be as you expect them to be.”

“But how can he say that the Pharisee did not leave the Temple virtuous?” said Andrew. “In what had he sinned? He did everything he was required to do. Who pays tithes on *everything*? And what did the tax-collector do except admit that he was a sinner? What I require to know is how recognizing what you are absolves you from your sins.”

“Clearly, there is more to it than that. The tax-collector was beating his breast and begging for mercy, after all. He was hardly bragging at how clever he was at sinning. He wished forgiveness, and forgiveness was granted him. It is a question of attitude, I suppose. Remember David after Bathsheba, and his psalm. He was forgiven.”

“But he had to pay,” Andrew countered. “His beloved son was killed.”

“True. But he *was* forgiven, and so was the tax-collector. We know not what he had to pay afterwards.”

“Well I think he should have mentioned it. Why should sinners simply have everything wiped away as if they had done no harm?”

Nathanael paused, pondering, and finally said, “I *think*, Andrew, that we have entered a new order of things.”

“It seems we have.” answered Andrew. “Especially since the Pharisee’s virtue did him no good. I might grant what you say about the tax-collector, but why should the Pharisee’s virtuous acts count for nothing? Explain me that!”

“You notice how proud he was of everything he did? ‘Not like the rest of men,’ or whatever he said.”

“Did *you* notice, Bartholomew, that he expressed gratitude to God that he was as he was?”

True, but . . . “Yes, but he had a list of all his good deeds ready to hand. Why was he praying thus to God, reminding him of all that he had done for him? One does nothing for God! God is infinite; he needs nothing from us.”

“Then why does he require us to do things?”

“Obviously, for *your* sake. They make us better—”

“But not if we do them as if we were doing favors for God, or bargaining with him. No one bargains with the Almighty.” Was *that* the Pharisee’s sin, thought Andrew. How?

“But it is not fair! It is not just!”

“You sound like what Ezekiel says the Master said about the Israelites when they complained that he was not fair in punishing a man who had been virtuous his whole life and then committed one sin and in forgiving a notorious sinner who then turned and became virtuous. He said something such as, ‘Am I unfair, Israel, or is it you who are unfair? If I reward the man I reward him for his virtue, not for his previous sins, and

if I punish the man, I punish him for his sin, not for the previous virtue.”

“Yes, I know.” Andrew answered. “I have heard the Scripture, and it has always bothered me.”

“Evidently, you do not see things as God sees them.”

“And you do, I suppose.”

“Put it this way: I am willing to consider that there may be another way of looking at things. And to return to this story, the Master’s point was that those who elevate themselves will be lowered, apparently whatever the reasons they can give for elevating themselves, and those who lower themselves—and I suppose, beg for mercy—will be elevated, whatever they have done. Perhaps that is because of the way things will be when God takes over as King.”

“It seems a rather easy way to escape the consequences of one’s acts.”

“I rather suspect it is anything but easy. It requires a whole new way of thinking—and after all, the Master is constantly saying that we must change our way of thinking, since God is about to begin his rule over us.”

Andrew paused, and then said in a rather disgruntled tone, “I suppose I have not managed it, then.”

“I doubt if any of us has.”

Fifteen

ANDREW HAD ALL BUT DECIDED to go then and there to question (to confront?) Jesus on the topic, but he at that moment seemed to have reached the house he had mentioned, which turned out to be Simon's. He stopped in the doorway, and immediately a rather large crowd began to gather around him. "Afterwards," Andrew said to himself.

Jesus began a speech or sermon, which no one was paying particular attention to; they were all still too interested in the fact that Matthew was evidently going to be one of their number, and were anything but happy about it, and some were even quite annoyed, like Andrew, that all his sins would have been simply forgotten, if the story had any meaning at all.

He looked at Matthew, who had not heard anything of what Jesus had said before, and realized that he, also like Andrew and practically everyone else, was not hearing what he was saying. Matthew seemed too concerned with whether his sins had been simply erased, or whether he was expected to pay for them somehow. The pained and worried look on his face, as much as shouted, "Will I have to give up all I own?" a

prospect he evidently found anything but pleasant.

Suddenly there was a commotion behind Jesus in the house, drawing everyone's attention. Something was going on on the roof, but the students were too close to see what it was.

All at once, the ceiling opened, and a stretcher came down through a hole made in the thatch of the roof. Simon looked indignantly up at the vandalism, and was about to mount the ladder on the side when the stretcher, with a young man lying on it, came to rest just at the feet of Jesus, who was actually standing slightly inside the doorway, talking to the crowd that packed the space in front of the house.

Jesus looked at the youth, and then up through the hole in the roof, and said to the—evidently paralyzed—boy lying there, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” The boy's face suddenly lit up with relief and joy; it was as if this was what he had hoped for, rather than the obvious, to be free of his paralysis.

Another case of forgiving sins! thought Andrew. What could they have been? Were they what paralyzed him? And was everything simply erased? And was it *Jesus* who forgave the sins, whatever they were, or did he simply declare that God had done it? Of course, if he were the “beloved Son,” it probably made no difference. Or did it?

The crowd, however, was in no mood to engage in philosophical speculation. “Why does he speak thus? This is blasphemy! Who is able to forgive sins except the one God?” Exactly. And if the Reign of God was about to start, it would doubtless be the Reign of Jesus.

Jesus looked over the crowd, at one or two of those who had been complaining. “Why are you having debates about this, and harboring evil thoughts? Which is easier, to tell him

his sins are forgiven, or to tell him to stand up and walk?

“But to let you know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins,” and he turned to the paralyzed lad, “I tell you, stand up, take your stretcher, and go home.”

And the boy stood up, and crying, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” picked up his stretcher, and went off, leaping and shouting.

Everyone was awestruck. “We have never seen anything like this.” “Praise God!” “How did he do it?” “Strange things are happening today!” “Then his sins must have been forgiven!” “Nonsense!” “What else could it mean? You heard what he said!” “But if only God can forgive sins—” “Yes. What then?” “I do not understand it.”

Well, there was no question now. It was Jesus who forgave the sin, even if only God can forgive sins. So Jesus was God, somehow, even though he was his “beloved Son.” It boggled the mind. But then, a paralyzed boy simply leaping up—as a *sign* of Jesus’s divinity—and running off home boggled the mind.

As people were milling about, discussing what had happened, Andrew was about to approach Jesus with his question about Matthew and Ezekiel, but Matthew got there ahead of him, and said something or other to him in a low voice. Jesus also answered in such a way that no one heard, and they began a rather lengthy conversation, in the midst of which Jesus laughed and said, loud enough to be heard, “Your problem, Matthew, is not that you do not believe, but that you do not believe that you believe,” and then lapsed into the undertone again, as Matthew struggled to understand him. They gradually walked off, still talking, not noticed by anyone

except Andrew, and interestingly John, Thomas and—of course—Ezra, and after a short time were not visible by anyone.

Ezra, who was fairly near Andrew, said to Thomas, “Interesting. Did you see? Once again there and then nowhere. The two of them.”

“Indeed?” answered Thomas. “I simply assumed that they had turned a corner or something while I was not looking.”

“They turned *some* kind of corner. I was following them carefully, wondering if just this would happen. It was as it was with him in Nazareth. No one could say just when it occurred, but afterwards they were not there. One must blink, after all.”

“Well, if they went somewhere private, that is their business, I suppose.”

“Still, it is interesting.”

“What is there that is *not* ‘interesting’ connected with this man?”

So he was gone and Andrew’s interview with him would have to be postponed again. John and Ezra went on talking, but Andrew wandered off, trying to fathom what the cure of the paralytic did for his problem. It seemed to shed no light on it. The boy’s sin was forgiven, and the cure confirmed that Jesus did it. But did that mean that everything involved in the sin was simply erased? *That* was the question that Matthew’s forgiveness raised. How could one erase the misery he had caused?

But Jesus was not there to be asked, and so Andrew sought Judas, who seemed the most intelligent and learned of the students.

Judas happened to be with Simon, Andrew’s brother, and

Thomas. Andrew approached and said, "So, Judas, what do you make of all this? It has me bewildered."

"Well, Andrew," he replied, "I was just saying to Simon that it is obvious that Jesus is filled with the Divine Spirit in a way even beyond what the prophets, including such as Elijah and Elisha were. They had to invoke God, while the Master simply does miraculous things as if by his own power."

"As if?" said Andrew. "You think it is *not* by his own power?" Did he not say that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins?

"Well, clearly, it is by the power of God. They are perfectly right; only God can forgive sins. But 'The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.'" So Judas *had* noticed this. "Either he is saying that he *is* God, or he is claiming that God has given him this power. But only God Himself can forgive sins, and God is a spirit, not someone with flesh and blood. So the only reasonable thing to do is say that he is a man somehow filled with God. Either that, or he is a liar."

"Or," said Simon, "he is God."

"And you can see how absurd that is, I hope."

Simon, who could and could not, made no reply, and that seemed to end the discussion. What *was* there to reply?

Thomas also seemed to be a bit nervous, as if he had some information that made him think it not absurd. And Andrew also did not think that the case was as open-and-shut as Judas made it out to be, though he did not want to bring up his vague idea for Judas to ridicule. He wandered off by himself, pondering this last development.

But when one thought about it, how absurd would it be for the Infinite to limit Himself? Of course, he would be

infinitely beyond the limited “version” of Himself, just as a man walking about with his eyes closed still was capable of seeing, even though he was for practical purposes blind. It was thinkable, at least. In that case, the limited “version” could actually do what the Infinite Himself could do, since he *was* merely—merely! Andrew laughed to himself—the Infinite in a limited “version,” whatever that might mean; but there would be a sense in which they were the same, if even there was a “they” there. If this were true, then Jesus, the limited “version” could occasionally step out of his limitations in one way or another—as the “blind” man could open his eyes—and perform some miracle.

What incredible nonsense this all sounded! And yet, “only God can forgive sins,” and “the Son of Man has the power on earth to forgive sins.” And think of all the other things he did, the cures, the casting out of demons (who always seemed to be about to tell the world that he was the Son of God, before he silenced them).

But what of the damage the sin caused? Could that be erased somehow? But how? Not by making it not have happened, but—but that it would be something like Zebedee’s legs, an event which turned out to be not really damage. If Jesus was a limited “version” of the Unlimited Being, then he could manage the harm, presumably, as he had managed the legs of Zebedee.

Perhaps.

Then that would mean that Thomas’s brother Samuel somehow had had a *favor* done to him by being killed at that time and in that way. How far-fetched! Of course, the death was not a murder, but an accident, and did not the Master

arrange things so that those he loved and who loved him would ultimately not suffer? Was *that* all that was necessary to take care of the harm one's sins had done? And even if it *was* a murder (which was absurd, but even if), then as far as Samuel and his fate was concerned, it was the same as an accident. That is, the *sin* of causing the death had nothing to do with it as a sin, since the *act* was the same whether it was the result of deliberate malice or not. So perhaps God could turn this into another case of Zebedee's legs, somehow. And so with the harm from every sin; it was the same as the harm from an earthquake or a tornado, for which no human was responsible. Presumably, God would not allow the victims ultimately to suffer from these things, but would somehow make them better off than they would have been if it had not happened. In that case, the sin or lack of it was irrelevant.

Perhaps. But did that mean that the sinner was absolved from responsibility? When looked at in this way, it made no sense. I hated you and maimed you; let God see to making it right.

So Andrew went futilely back and forth.

Jesus joined them after a while, looked over at John with a rather amused smile on his face, and then said to everyone that Matthew had an errand to perform, and would rejoin them on the morrow.

Jesus, Andrew saw to his joy, did not seem to be very occupied; and in fact he went over to Andrew as if to enter into a private conversation, and said, "You are close, Andrew. Quite close."

"Master!" said Andrew, wondering what he meant.

"About the limited 'version' of the Infinite Being. I told

John, in fact, back when the other John was bathing people, that one day I would reveal that the Father and I were one and the same thing. You have all but concluded to it. You are very astute.”

“Well thank you, Master.” Andrew blushed. “But there is much and much that I do not understand.”

“You had a problem with Ezekiel, for instance.”

If he was the limited “version” of the Creator, clearly he knew what Andrew had been thinking. Still, it was a shock.

“It does not seem fair to me,” he managed to say.

“And you wonder if your notion of what is fair is why you are here.”

“That thought had crossed my mind. It does not seem to . . .”

“Let me ask you this: Is Thomas a drunk?”

“Well, he *was* a drunk.”

“True, but *is* he one?”

“As far as I know, no. I have not seen him drink anything but water, and he never acts drunk. I suppose he is not.”

“So a person who was a drunk and then stops drinking is not really a drunk after he stops.”

“ . . . I suppose not.”

“And by the same token, is a person who, like Thomas, has devoted his whole life to sinning some other way and then stops sinning and acts virtuously, is that person now a sinner or a virtuous person?”

“When you put it that way, obviously a virtuous person.”

“And why would one punish a virtuous person for his sins? His *reality* is that of a virtuous person, even though he *was* a sinner. That is, you are punishing him as a sinner, though

he, like Thomas, is virtuous. Does *that* make sense?”

“Well, but he *did* commit the sins.”

“True, and Thomas *did* get drunk. But why punish Thomas *now* for his drunkenness if he is not drunk?”

“You are saying that now he is not the same person as the drunk, or the sinner.”

“Exactly. What you *are* is what you are now, not what you were. You were a boy, but what you are is a man. You are the same person, but you are not the same, and should not be treated like a boy. So to go back to Ezekiel, when a man sins and then repudiates the sin and acts virtuously, he *now* is a virtuous person, the very opposite of the sinner, and my Father regards him as what he *is*, not what he was. And, of course, when the virtuous person repudiates himself as virtuous and commits sin, then what he is is a sinner, and deserves the consequences of what he is, not what he was. It makes no sense to reward someone for something that he has rejected, just because he once believed differently.”

“It still . . .”

“I know. It is not fair. But how ‘fair’ is it to punish a virtuous man who has rejected his life of sin? You are punishing a virtuous man as a sinner, and he is not a sinner.”

“When you put it that way, it makes sense. But still . . .”

“You say, well, what of the damage he has done? But you yourself found the solution to that. *Any* harm that comes to a person that he did not deliberately bring on himself is in the providence of my Father, who loves him, and who has the power to turn the evil into good, as you saw in the case of Zebedee. I am telling you that this always is the case, though it may not be apparent in this life. Even, for instance, with

Samuel. And it may be, if things develop in a certain way, that Thomas and his father may discover that, for instance.”

“That is a saying that is very hard to accept, you realize.”

“And that is one of the reasons I am here; to establish the Kingdom, where it will be apparent. In fact, where the harm simply will not happen. And even if I am rejected, and harm remains on the earth (because evil *will* have its punishment), then it will still be true that ultimately, all will be well for those who love my Father.

“But if evil *will* have its punishment, what of the harm the sinner has done? Does that simply disappear? What I mean is, is he not responsible for it?”

“Indeed he is. Each sinner suffers for his sins, even after he has rejected them. My Father is just, not simply merciful. Have you noticed how Thomas strokes that little bladder he has at his side?”

“How could one not notice it? It happens every hour, it seems.”

“He does that to fight off the desire to drink from it, on the grounds that if he did not have it, he would be so frantic he would go find a wineskin and drink. Some day, he will do without it, and that day will seem the end of the world to him, even though he has not had a drink of anything but water for over a year now. The *sin* is gone, but the effects of the sin continue to torment him, because he *has* done damage to himself, which can only be repaired slowly, and will never really completely disappear—until the Kingdom is established.

“And have you noticed the worried look on Matthew’s face?”

“I have. He seems concerned about whether he will have

to pay back those he cheated.”

“And you think he has reason to be concerned.”

“Well, he *did* cheat them, and does he not have a responsibility to them?”

“Yes, of course. And he is concerned with facing it. But one must take one step at a time, not leap over whole countries at a bound. But notice that there is no practical way he can actually pay back those he cheated, because there is no way he can know who they were exactly, or what damage he has actually done and so forth.”

“But that makes the whole situation impossible.”

“Not impossible, when my Father is taken into account. My Father knows each of his victims, and has care for each of them. Matthew must—and will—make some effort at restitution, but he need not worry about *his doing* strict justice, because strict justice in a human sense is impossible. But if he tries, then he and my Father will bring it about that he actually helped rather than hurt them—that they are better off for his cheating and his attempt at restitution, though he himself may not realize this. My Father loves each of us, and will not allow us to be harmed by others, whether, as in Thomas’s case, accidentally, or as with Matthew, by ignoring the harm he was doing. Did you notice what he was doing when I called him?”

“It seemed there was something in his hand.”

“It was a knife. He was going to stab himself to death—which would have only compounded the evil, of course. That was what I stopped. But the point is that he had come to realize for a very significant reason the harm he was doing to others. That was when he was ready to change his way of thinking, and that is why I was there.”

Andrew realized that whatever this “significant reason” was, it was not for him to know. It also implied, of course, that everything was somehow “arranged.” It was a frightening thought.

“Have no fear,” said Jesus, answering what was not spoken. The Father and I love you all. There is nothing to worry about. But there is something more to this. We have separated out the sin from the act the sinner performs, and rightly so. A person might sin in wanting to kill, say, a crippled man, and in his attempt, he frightens the man so that he recovers from his paralysis. His *sin* was murder, but his *act* actually cured his victim; so the two are not the same.

“The sin, you see, lies in the *choice* the sinner makes. He wishes in some way to do something that contradicts his reality. And of course, he cannot actually contradict his reality, and so what he wishes to do is actually impossible. It is this attempt to do the impossible that is the sin; but *that* exists only in the choice, not in the act by which he tries to carry out the choice.

“But that choice is a spiritual act, and therefore an eternal act; and as an attempt to do the impossible, it is a self-frustrating act. That means that the sinner carries beyond his death into eternity the self-frustrating attempt to do the impossible—and so is frustrated for eternity. And that is a fate far worse than maiming or crippling, or any earthly punishment. *That* is what I save him from by forgiving, or if you will, erasing, the sin. It does not change the act; it removes the self-defeating choice. Do you follow?”

“I am not certain, but I *think* I do. What you say, Master, makes a great deal of sense, though I—I understand very little of it at the moment. I am overwhelmed with what you have

told me. I have enough to think about already for the rest of my life. But, though I do not really grasp more than a small bit of it, at least I can now see that there is another way to look at things.

“I think.”

“I have given you about three times as much as I would be able to give others, and I realize that you must digest all this at your leisure. Let us therefore mingle with the others. That is enough for now. There is more that concerns you, but we can leave that for later.”

“It is more than enough for now, certainly. Thank you, Master.”

Sixteen

The group was at that time going around the different towns and villages in Galilee, collecting followers who joined them and left more or less at random, into a synagogue if there was one, where Jesus announced that the reign of God was about to begin, and that the people would have to acquire a new way of thinking.

In one of their pauses in this mission, John asked of Andrew, “Could he mean that what Isaiah prophesied was really going to come to pass?”

“You mean where everything would be at peace with everything else, lions and lambs and so on?”

“Exactly.”

“That *has* to be a metaphor, John. Lions eating hay like oxen? Really, now.”

“Well why not?” replied John, becoming a bit red-faced at being flatly contradicted. “Has he not cured all sorts of diseases with nothing more than a touch, and driven out demons? Why could this not be a sign that the whole world would be transformed?”

“No, no, you understand nothing, both of you,” broke in

Simon the Revolutionary, with his usual refrain. “The ‘new way of thinking’ means that we have to get out of our minds that we will be under the Romans forever, and that they cannot be defeated. If we do not get rid of *that* attitude, no new kingdom is possible.”

“You always see everything in terms of a revolution, Simon,” answered John. “But there must be more to it than that—if that is even in it.”

“What do you mean, ‘even in it?’” retorted Simon. “If God is going to become King, then Caesar will have to be dethroned, will he not?”

“Not necessarily. Remember, the first Herod was king some years ago, and we were under Rome then. There is kingship and kingship.”

“There is such a thing as a spiritual kingdom,” put in Andrew, where we *look at* things in a different way, rather than actually having a different government. Especially if God is the one who is King. How else would he govern? Is he going to set up a throne in the clouds or something?” He was very much under the influence of what Jesus had told him.

“Nonsense!” said Simon, and John added, “In that case, the whole thing is a waste of time, it seems to me. If everything is going to be the same, and we are simply going to *pretend* that it is all new and wonderful, what has happened except that we have been deluded?”

“Exactly!” said Simon. “As long as Rome has us under its thumb and is bleeding us to death with its taxes, we will be in misery, and what is the point of denying it?”

“And then what is the point of all the miraculous things Jesus is doing?” added John.

“Need there be a point, except that these people are in distress?” asked Andrew. He had to be “arranging” things so that good would be brought out of evil. “Jesus sees them and cares about them, and somehow has the power to cure them, and so he does.”

“You are not paying attention, Andrew.” replied John. “He does not cure everyone; only those who he says ‘believe.’”

“Well, *that* is easily explained by saying that what they believe is that they will be cured. It is quite possible that the power Jesus has will only be effective if someone is convinced that he can do whatever it is.”

“No, no, they are signs. Signs of what it will be like under the reign of God. He *says* so, in plain language.”

“To me,” answered Andrew, “it is anything but plain. There are all kinds of things that this new Kingdom, if there even is a physical kingdom, could be like.”

“As to that,” said John, “he told me, now that he has acquired the number he was looking for, that he will soon lay out the principles of this new realm of God.” He looked over at Matthew, and so did Andrew, with a not-very-welcoming glance.

“You will see,” said Simon the Revolutionary. “He will begin appointing generals soon.”

“From *us*?” laughed John. “I can see Andrew here, and perhaps yourself, leading an army. But the rest of us? Now *that* would be a miraculous transformation.”

“All I can say is, remember Judas Maccabeus. Who would have thought beforehand that he could do what he did?”

The conversation then became general, and Andrew, who was about to join Thomas, noticed him approach Matthew,

and went off by himself for a while to muse on what he had been told.

At this point, John who had also wandered off, saw Andrew and came up to him. He still seemed to admire him, which warmed Andrew toward him. “And so what think you, Andrew,” he said, “about our new acquisition?”

“You mean Levi? Or I mean, Matthew? Well, if the Master chose him, I suppose he sees some value in him as a follower, though I doubt he will be one of the inner circle.”

“You do? I got the impression that he was precisely waiting for Matthew—or perhaps was waiting, and then Matthew seemed to be the one he was waiting for.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have noticed that Jesus knows things beforehand only in a sense. Have you seen him stroke his beard?”

“Stroke his beard?”

“At the wedding, when his mother asked him about the lack of wine, he stroked his beard in thought, and then at the Passover, he stroked his beard before he took off his cincture and asked me for mine.”

“He did, now that you mention it.”

“He seemed to recognize in both cases, ‘This is the moment,’ as if he had been anticipating it, but was not certain beforehand what shape it would take. And I *think* I remember when he came back from seeing that Nicodemus or whoever it was, he said to Simon something like, ‘It is not what I would have planned, but it will do.’”

“Interesting. Are you saying that at the Passover, he was expecting that something was going to happen that would give his—what would you call it? Ministry—a start, and the animals

there told him, so to speak, 'this is it?'

"Something along those lines. At the beginning, for instance, I suspect he knew that something significant would happen when he was bathed by John, and the dove and the thunder were something he recognized as 'This is what I was anticipating,' without necessarily having a picture of it beforehand in his mind. And when he saw us, he knew that we were to be two of his followers, though he had not probably thought of us that way when he was doing carpentry work for me years ago."

"I *think* what you are getting at is that the God-aspect of him, if I can call it that, knows things in a different *way* than the man-aspect, and the man-aspect recognizes it when it happens as the God-aspect anticipates it." God as limited, he thought, thinks differently from the same God who does not have the limitations.

"It looks as if that is as good a description as any."

He laughed. "But what monstrous nonsense we are talking!"

"On the other hand, Andrew, how else account for him? I cannot accept Judas's view that he is full of the force that built the universe, as if that force were a power and not a person."

"No, I think Judas is mistaken in that."

"Then if he has the power to forgive sins, and if only God can forgive sins, and if God is 'my Father,' what else could it be but that he is God limiting himself somehow?"

"But there is *some* difference between him and the Father. Otherwise why give him another name? And why pray to him, as he clearly does? All night, sometimes. He does not sleep on

those nights he goes off to pray. I followed him once.”

“Still, he told me that ‘the Father and I are one and the same thing.’”

“He did?” Andrew did not feel he had the right to reveal that Jesus had told him that he had said this.

“He did. And he said that he would tell everyone some day, when they were prepared to hear it.”

“Perhaps, then,” said Andrew, trying to find the proper terms to restate his idea, “the Father is God-*as*-infinite, and Jesus the man is God-*as*-limited, or something. And so the limited side of him prays to the infinite side of him.”

“Or something.” John now laughed in his turn.

“I am happy that no one is listening to us,” said Andrew. “We are all but talking rubbish.”

“Still, who are we to think that we can comprehend the Infinite? Is it surprising that what we say sounds paradoxical? Jesus, whatever he is, is a paradox.”

“I know. That is what I find suspicious about Judas. It looks as if he thinks he comprehends. And I think the reality is far, far, beyond what he imagines it to be.”

“I’m inclined to agree. But I suspect that Judas will learn, as the facts become clearer.”

“I wonder.”

“Really, Andrew! You too?”

“I am sorry, John, but there is just something about Judas that does not—” He let the rest of the sentence hang, for lack of a way to finish.

“Well, we shall see. What is *this* now?”

They were near the village of Nain at the moment. It seemed that a tiny funeral procession had crossed their path.

There were quite a few—almost a hundred—people around Jesus, when he stopped and signaled to the bearers of the stretcher on which the body had been laid, wrapped in in a linen cloth, with the napkin tied over the head. The mother was frantically wailing in despair beside it. There did not seem to be a father present.

Jesus went up to her. “Do not cry,” he said.

“Oh, sir!” she wailed. “First my husband, and now him! It is too much! Too much! I cannot bear it! What will I do, alone in the world? How will I live?”

Jesus made no attempt to utter consoling words. He went past the woman to the bier, touched the wrapped body, and said in a matter-of-fact, quiet voice, “Young man, I tell you, sit up.”

And he sat up.

Jesus freed him from the napkin and began loosening the shroud from over his head. Someone cried, “Here! Find him something to wear! He is naked under that shroud!” and one of the men took off his cloak and handed it to Jesus, who put it over the boy’s head as the linen fell off.

Everyone was struck dumb as they saw him blink in the failing sunlight. Then they suddenly began shouting, “A great prophet has risen among us!” “Another Elisha!” “God has smiled on his people!” “Who would have believed it?” “Did you see? Did you see?” “How bewildered he looks!” “He cannot have actually been dead; I have heard of such things in the past.” “Then how did he know of it? Everyone else thought him dead!” “Behold the mother!” She screamed and ran up to him, smothering him in her arms and weeping hysterically.

The boy looked a trifle embarrassed at all the attention, and his eyes for a moment looked over her shoulder as if to say, "What is all the fuss?" and then caught sight of—it must have been Matthew, thought Andrew—and his expression changed in an instant to a gaze of horror and disbelief.

Matthew himself had turned to see if he had noticed anything behind him, and there might have been six or seven people that he could have seen. Obviously he knew nothing of the boy, who quickly recovered from his astonishment, and was asking his mother and everyone around him where he was, and what he was doing on this stretcher.

What was this all about? And look at the boy's neck, that red strip around it. He looked as if he had been hanged—which meant that he had hanged himself, did it not? Combine that with the look of loathing at Matthew; was Matthew somehow responsible for his committing suicide? But he was too young to be managing a farm, though his tan showed that he worked on one. And his mother said, "First my husband and now him!" Had his father killed himself and then the son, overwhelmed with the burdens of a head of household did the same? But then, what of Matthew? Perhaps the father killed himself in despair at what Matthew had driven him to, and the son knew this.

While he was firing questions at his mother about why he was there, he seemed to remember something, and his face lost whatever color it had recovered, and it looked for a moment that he was going to faint. He whispered something in his mother's ear, and she nodded tearfully, and then said "But you have come back! You are with me once again! Thank God! Oh, thank God! —And (to Jesus) thank you, Sir, so very, very

much!”

“Your faith has brought him back to you.”

“You are right! I could not believe I had lost him forever! I knew somehow he would come back to me! And you have done it!”

At any rate, thought Andrew, it proved that Jesus had power to bring the dead back to life, and was definitely another sign that he was the Infinite as self-limited somehow. And the boy must have remembered something either about what being dead was like or perhaps what had caused the death—which doubtless had something to do with the mark on his neck.

The boy whispered something else in her ear, and she said to Jesus, “You are Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet we have heard so much of?”

“I am.”

“I was looking for you! I was praying I would meet you! I told myself that if I met you and you saved my son, I would join you. What else have I to live for?”

“Well, if you think you would like to come after me, feel free to join us. And you, child? What is your name, by the way?”

“David, son of Asa. Yes, I would join you also.” He said this perhaps a bit reluctantly, but then cast a quick look in Matthew’s direction, and seemed to come to a resolution as he turned back to Jesus. Aha! thought Andrew. It looks very much as if he would like to take vengeance on Matthew for whatever he thinks he had done. A case where he did not recognize that Matthew *now* was not the same as the Matthew who had done it. But of course, it was not that simple. The man is not now a boy, but the man and the boy are one and

the same. So with Matthew. How unjust would it be for this David to make Matthew now suffer for what Matthew then had done to him? What Jesus said made sense, but this made sense also.

“You may leave, of course, whenever you please; I realize that you are not in a state for making permanent decisions at the moment. —Nor were you, yesterday, is it not?”

The boy blushed. “It would seem not, indeed.” And so Jesus wanted him near, so that he could keep an eye on him.

“I trust, then, that there will be no more of that in the future.”

“No, Master.”

“You need have no fear. Your sins are forgiven.”

The boy hung his head. “Thank you, Master.” It looked as if he were not so eager to have his sins forgiven; it almost looked as if he were plotting to commit more sins.

The boy then said something to his mother and ran off, probably to get cleaned of the spices and dressed. Matthew had moved a bit apart to listen to Jesus speak of the fact that during the coming reign of God, they would have to change their way of thinking; but most of the people were too enthralled by what had happened to listen, and there was hubbub and confusion among them.

After a time, during which discussions that went nowhere continued, the boy ran back, clean and in new clothes, carrying the cloak that had been loaned to him, while Matthew was speaking to Jesus, saying something about giving a feast. The boy heard him, and said to Jesus, “A feast? Then surely he will need help, Master! Let me go with him; I can do much, and will do it gladly!”

Matthew answered that he would not trouble him, and he replied, “There is no trouble; and besides, I would prefer not to have people gawking at me and me and asking me what it felt like to be dead!”

Andrew was about to step forward and warn against it, when Matthew accepted his offer, and Jesus stroked his beard, looking at the two of them, and nodded permission. Jesus, it seemed, was aware of what the danger was—if he was God the Son, he had to know everything he needed as man to know—but he also somehow knew, based on stroking his beard, that Matthew was not really going to get his head chopped off in his sleep.

Neither Matthew nor the boy appeared the next day, evidently busy with preparations for the feast on the morrow. The boy had apparently decided to sleep at Matthew’s house. His mother had fretted a bit, as did Andrew privately, but Jesus assured her that he would be perfectly safe with Matthew and his slave. That was not really the question, thought Andrew; the question was whether *Matthew* was safe. But presumably, Jesus had this in mind also.

Seventeen

AND SURE ENOUGH, when they ARRIVED at the—one could only call it mansion—the next day, there was Matthew, with the boy behind him, both dressed in fine linen, Matthew welcoming them in a kind of embarrassed way, as well as a number of what turned out to be tax-collectors, all standing by awkwardly, as if wondering whether the new guests had any idea what they were.

As the servers passed around the wines, Andrew heard Nathanael whisper to Thomas, (who was drinking water) that the wine was almost up to the wine Jesus made at the wedding. Thomas looked at him with longing, but did not take any. Andrew thought this very admirable; the “new Thomas,” it seemed, was indeed the real Thomas.

It was a fairly tense dinner, because, except for Jesus’s students, no one knew anyone else to talk to. Evidently tax-collectors did not form a guild, and perhaps were at odds with each other; they were in competition, after all.

But the wine had not been very diluted, and its relaxing influence spread rapidly. People began to speak rather more

freely after a short time, and the dinner soon could be said to be a success. Afterwards, people kept their cups and rose from the table, looking over the house and talking.

Suddenly, Jesus let out a piercing whistle and ran out the back, where the dogs (about which the guests had been warned) had been chained. Matthew sprang up and followed.

Andrew, like all the rest, sat frozen for a moment in shock; there was definitely a commotion of some sort back there. Jesus seemed to have shouted something—a command to the dogs?—and of course Ezra tried to go out, but Matthew stood in the doorway, blocking the exit, as he watched openmouthed what Jesus was doing. (Ezra tried to see over his head, but could not do so without actually leaning against him, and gave up.) Interestingly, Nathanael was blocking the only window that provided a view.

Whatever it was did not take long, and Matthew came back inside, followed by Jesus and one of the tax-collectors, whose eyes looked as if he had narrowly escaped death, though there was not a mark on him or his clothes. When asked what had happened, he simply protested that he was fine, but that he thought that he should be getting home. He thanked Matthew perfunctorily, and went out the front, where a crowd had gathered outside the gate, to find out if it were really true that Jesus was consorting with tax-collectors and sinners.

Thomas, with Andrew following closely, went up to Nathanael, who had just spoken to Matthew, and asked, “What went on?”

“Matthew asked me not to speak of it, and so I cannot say, but it is probably what you thought it was.”

Ezra, who was, as always, present, said, “So he is Master

of vicious dogs also.”

“He is Master of everything, it seems. Everything,” and he added, “Thank God!” Andrew thought, Well, it fits. The dogs knew him and obeyed him because he was the Master of masters.

A few days later, Jesus informed the group that his father had died. He took Simon, James and John, and, interestingly, Matthew, and went to his funeral, leaving Andrew more or less in charge.

Not that there was anything to be in charge *of*. The rest of the group spent time speculating why Jesus had not cured his own father of whatever sickness he had, but no one had a really satisfactory answer.

Jesus and the four returned, without any great sorrow on their faces. Apparently, they had been told, or had found out, that Joseph’s leaving this life at this point in Jesus’s career was for the best, and presumably Joseph knew it. After all, at least until the Kingdom was inaugurated, we would all have to die. Andrew speculated that if Jesus was *not* accepted as King, however, if “this temple was destroyed,” then that was something that Joseph would find unbearable. But did that mean that Mary would also die?

Well, Jesus presumably knew what he was doing, and the four who had accompanied him were told enough of it to agree.

After Jesus and the others returned, the group happened to be in Cana for something-or-other, and a military officer, accompanied, interestingly enough, by the soldier who was with Matthew at the tax-booth, approached Jesus and begged him to go down with him to the city and cure his son, who was very

ill and about to die.

“You people!” said Jesus. “Unless you have proof and see miracles, you do not believe!” Jesus had not been performing cures during this period, perhaps out of respect for the memory of his father, but Jesus’s remark sounded pretty harsh. Perhaps there was something more going on here. The man was a Gentile, after all, in the first place, and probably had heard a rumor that Jesus could cure people, but was not too sure about it, and whether he as a Gentile would qualify as a beneficiary. Jesus may have been signaling to him that it was not presumptuous to approach him.

In any case, the remark did not deter him; he was obviously desperate. “Master, please!” he said. “Go down before my son dies!”

Jesus looked at him, stroked the beard on his chin, and answered, “You may go. Your son will live.”

The man opened his mouth as if to make a protest; but closed it when he looked into Jesus’ face, thinking better of it, and turned and left. Evidently, he had mustered a bit of faith that Jesus could perform the cure—even at a distance, and even with a word. This required, as Andrew considered the situation, a good deal of faith.

Of course, what alternative did he have? Give up, and then his son would certainly die.

The soldier gave a glance back at Matthew, as he pivoted to go. Andrew wondered if the officer had managed to believe that his son would in fact live, or whether his action was one of despair.

This was answered on the next day, when the soldier returned alone, finding Jesus, to whom he gave a rather

substantial gift from the father, remarking that the father had met a slave on the way home, who told him that the fever had left his son, and he wanted to waste no time in thanking him for restoring him to health. He had himself continued to his house to be with his son. Jesus accepted the gift, and handed it over to Judas for the group.

So, thought Andrew, the commander had sufficient faith, and we now learn that Jesus need not even be there in order to perform a miracle; it was enough for him to say that it would happen. Obviously, the son did not have faith; so it was enough that someone involved have it. This seemed to indicate that Jesus could perform any cure if he wished, but that his policy was not to perform one if he did not find any faith in anyone involved. It would be interesting to see if this theory survived the tests of future cures.

It also meant that one did not necessarily have to be a Judean to receive the benefits of Jesus's miracles—which was consistent, if Jesus was to become King of the whole world after establishing himself as King of Judea.

The soldier, dismissed, then sought out Matthew. They had a rather extended and earnest conversation that Ezra tried to learn about; but he was not “invisible” to the soldier and was warned off. (Matthew had never so much as acknowledged that he existed, for some reason).

“Well, Longinus, I wish you well,” said Matthew finally, loud enough so everyone could hear.

“And I you, Levi-Matthew, in your new life,” replied the soldier.

“If it lasts.”

“Oh, it will. You are hardly a fanatic, but I see the signs.”

“Well, we shall see about that also.” And the soldier left, humming quietly in his cheerful way.

That night Jesus excused himself from the group and went up to pray on a mountain overlooking the “Sea” of Galilee from the north. The others, Matthew now among them, stayed back halfway up (because on these occasions Jesus wished for privacy), on a kind of saddle that was still rather high. David, interestingly, slept beside Matthew that night, saying practically nothing, as was his wont. Andrew wondered whether he and Matthew had been reconciled because of the feast and their time spent together, or whether he still (if ever) had notions of vengeance, and was waiting for the opportune moment. It would obviously not do to kill Matthew with everyone there, looking on. Of course, perhaps the initial impression Andrew received was wrong—though, thinking back, it *did* look like a glance of intense hatred, and he *was* over-eager to “assist” Matthew at the feast. Well, the Master would keep watch, he was sure, and it was really none of his business.

The following morning, shortly after dawn, Jesus came down from the heights, looking refreshed. He called over a small group of twelve, Matthew finding to his surprise that he was one of them, and told them that if they were willing, they were to be his emissaries to the various towns of the area. If the crowds that were gathering wherever he went were any indication, he needed emissaries to extend himself.

“It is time,” Jesus in fact was saying, “for the good news about the reign of God to spread more rapidly than I can manage by myself. You will represent me, not only by announcing what you have basically heard me say, but also by

confirming by signs similar to mine that the world is indeed about to undergo a change. I will begin to spell out rather more explicitly what the reign of God will be like; you will see. I will give you instructions later on about what you are to do.”

By this time, word had spread as to where Jesus and his followers were—not that they had tried to make a secret of it—and a huge number of people of the area began to gather round on the saddle of the hill, bringing their sick and crippled for Jesus to cure—which he did, spending the morning at it. Andrew thought that he could have used his emissaries that very day, there were so many to cure.

Around noon, he went back up the mountain a short way, with by now quite a throng of people on the saddle below him, in a kind of natural amphitheater. He stood up and held up his hands to catch their attention and said,

“You have asked about the reign of God and how you are to change your way of thinking. Attend, then: It is a blessing for you to be poor, because then you have God for your king;”

“To be *poor*?” said some. “I am poor, and it is anything but a blessing!” “Silence! We cannot hear!””

“—hungry now, because then you will have your fill. It is a blessing for you to suffer now, because you will find happiness. It is a blessing for you when people hate you and drive you away, and ostracize you; on the day this happens, leap about for joy, because you have a great reward in heaven; your ancestors did the same to the prophets.

“This is insane!” “It is mad!” “He has a devil!” Then how can he cure everyone?” “Be *quiet*!”

“—comfort here now; it is a curse to be full now, because then you will be hungry; it is a curse that you enjoy life now,

because then you will suffer; and it is a curse to have everyone speak well of you, because your ancestors praised the false prophets in the same way.” He paused to let what he had said sink in.

This was a development. The things that people thought were curses: poverty, hunger, suffering, hatred, and ostracism, were blessings, and the blessings of comfort, satiety, enjoyment, and a good name were curses—now—because apparently in the Reign of God things would be reversed.

Andrew could see that Jesus might be counseling people to put up with the “blessings,” because soon they would *turn into* blessings when the Kingdom was established, but why are they supposed to be blessings *now*? And the same went for the curses. One might say that comfort was only temporary, and would vanish once the Kingdom came; but in what sense was it a curse *now* to live a life of ease?

The people were gasping with astonishment. What could he mean? How could it be a blessing to suffer and a curse to enjoy life? Someone near John said, “Then we should cause people to be poor and hungry, and do them a favor? It makes no sense!” Andrew tended to agree. A curse is a curse, whether it is temporary or permanent. How can it be a blessing?

Well, he thought, perhaps it was a blessing because it directed one’s attention away from the life he was living, and fixed it on the life in the Kingdom. And a life of comfort was a curse, because it made one complacent for the life he was living, and so tempted him to pay no attention to the fact that things would be very different. Obviously, a person who was enjoying life did not long for anything more than a prolongation of this life, and would be anything but eager for

it to turn upside down, as Jesus seemed to be hinting.

In *that* sense, it had reason, Andrew supposed.

Jesus went on, “You heard it said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’; but I tell those of you who can hear it, love your enemies and do good to the ones who hate you; pray for those who threaten you. If someone slaps your cheek, turn the other one for him to slap; if he takes your cloak, give him your tunic as well. Give to everyone who asks, and if someone takes what is yours, do not demand it back. In short, do to everyone else what you would have them do to you.”

“This is even worse!” said the man who spoke earlier. This went directly against Andrew’s grain. All his life, Simon had been preferred to him, when he was the more capable, and all his life, he had resented it as unjust. Now Jesus seemed to be saying that “justice” was the very opposite of what Andrew had always thought. “Do not care if someone mistreats you,” was what he seemed to be advocating. How could one do that? And more, *why should* one do that?

Obviously, Andrew had not “changed his way of thinking.” He hadn’t, because he had seen no reason to do so. And Jesus had offered no reason why this was the more virtuous action. Why act directly against one’s own interest? It was one thing to treat everyone equally, “to love your neighbor as if he were yourself,” but why love your neighbor *more* than yourself? Why subordinate yourself to him?

Around him, people were saying, “This is not an explanation of the Law; it is something he has made up.” “Who does he think he is? Another Moses?” said another. The listeners began a lively—and loud—discussion among themselves at how Jesus was apparently teaching them on his

own authority, and not like the Scripture scholars. Some scoffed at it, but others said, “But I repeat: If he does not have God behind him, how can he do what he does? You saw that man simply get up and walk when he merely touched him!”

And that was Andrew’s dilemma: If he was right (and Jesus in effect *said* he was right), this was the same Being who was the Author of the commands dictated to Moses. Those dictated to Moses made sense; but how could this make even more sense? To Andrew, it made no sense at all; but there *had* to be sense in it, if Jesus were commanding it.

And as if to confirm this, Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law and the prophets; I have come to fulfill them, not abolish them. I tell you this: as long as heaven and earth last, not the dot on one *i* or the cross on one *t* will be removed from the Law—not until everything is all over. And so if any man sets aside the least command in the Law, he will have the lowest place when God begins his reign, and anyone who keeps the Law and teaches others to do so will rank high God’s kingdom. In fact, unless you show that you are better than the Pharisees and Scripture scholars, you will not even enter God’s kingdom.”

“I am not too certain that I *wish* to be in such a kingdom,” said a man. “We have burdens enough already.”

What this meant to Andrew was that there was some way of understanding this (which eluded him at the moment) which was compatible with the Law and the Prophets, and which in fact fulfilled them—but he could not for the life of him fathom how.

And Jesus kept on, “And do not be evaluating others’ conduct, or your own conduct will be evaluated. Forgive, and

you will be forgiven; give, and things will be given to you—good measure, tamped down, and overflowing will be poured into your pocket; because the standard you use for measuring others will be the standard you are measured by.

“*That*, at least makes sense,” thought Andrew, and a man beside him said exactly that. “Treat everyone fairly.” “Yes,” said another, “but then why not slap the person who has slapped you? *That* is what is fair to my way of thinking, as well as the other.” “It is not the same thing,” said the first. “I see no difference,” was the answer. Nor did Andrew. His head was beginning to ache.

“Can the blind be guides for the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A student is not above his teacher; at best, when a student finishes, he will be equal to his teacher.”

“I am not certain,” said one, “that I wish to be a student of *this* teacher. ‘Turn your other cheek to be slapped’ indeed! Not *my* cheek. My fist, perhaps!” Andrew longed to be a true student of this teacher, but could not imagine how to manage it.

“How is it you can see a speck in your brother’s eye and not notice the board in your own? You fraud; take the board out of your own eye before you presume to take the speck from your brother’s.”

“And you do the same,” shouted someone. “Are you perfect? Who do you think you are?”

The trouble is, thought Andrew, that they do not know who he “thinks he is.” He “thinks” he is God Almighty, because he *is* God Almighty, or everything he has done up to now is a sham and a fraud—and I know too much to think that it is a series of magic tricks.

Jesus was going on, though the crowd was becoming louder and louder. Interestingly, though, his voice rose above it. “—call me ‘Master! Master!’ and not do what I say? I will tell you what a person who comes to me and listens to what I say and puts it into practice is like: he is like a man who was building a house, and dug deep and laid its foundation on bedrock; and when the flood came, the river burst on that house, and it withstood it, because it was built on rock. But the one who hears me and does not act on it is like a man building his house on sand. The river rose, and the house collapsed into a heap of rubble.”

That was the end of it. Andrew was reeling from the verbal blows he had to everything he thought he knew. He wandered around for a while, and happened to hear Nathanael—Bartholomew—talking to John. John was saying something close to what he thought, so he stopped to listen to their conversation

“—because” said John, “they would make you look forward to the Reign of God and not wed you to the life you were living. It would be easy to change your way of thinking.”

Very good, thought Andrew. What I myself thought.

“All right. But why let someone slap you a second time? Why give him your tunic if he steals your mantle?”

John thought a bit. Here was where the difficulty began. “It *could* be the same sort of thing, could it not? I have not thought it through as yet, but could it not be that it would be part of not caring what happened to you now, knowing that in the Reign of God you would not have any suffering?”

“In other words, nothing makes any difference now, because it will all turn out well soon, so why fret over injustice?”

It will not count in the long run.”

“I must say I find that hard to swallow, but it sounds as if this is what he was saying.”

“I am inclined to agree. I suppose my thinking has not changed all that much.”

“Nor mine,” said John. “If someone slaps me, he would have a bloody nose before I could even think of turning the other cheek!”

“Still, there is a point there, if you think on it dispassionately. If he slaps you, how have you undone the slap by doing damage to *him*? You have just compounded the evil.”

John pondered a bit. “On the other hand, inviting him to slap you again compounds it also.”

“There is something we are missing,” mused Nathanael. “Perhaps it has something to do with not paying attention to yourself.”

“You mean, letting the other person have the satisfaction of pummeling you? I do not see it.”

“Well, he in effect said it.”

“Yes, but how does his continuing in evil benefit him? So if I care for him, why should I let him do a greater evil than he has done? So even if I care not for myself, because in the Reign of God all will be happiness, should I not care that he cease his evil ways? Should I not put a stop to them with my fist?”

Nathanael laughed. “I suppose if you could do it with a heart full of nothing but love for him, hoping that he too would enter the Reign of God with you, where you would embrace each other, then Jesus would approve. The question is whether anyone could ever manage such a thing.”

“Well, I fondly hope I will never get into a situation

where I will have the problem.”

“What *I* hope is that some day we will begin to understand what this is all about.”

“True, we have a long way to go.”

“And if *we* do, imagine what it will be like for all the rest of the people that we will be trying to prepare for the Reign of God!”

“Yes, that will be an adventure! Sent out as heralds to announce something we have only the foggiest idea about.”

“It fills me with terror.”

“And not only you, Bartholomew, believe me.” And with that they parted, leaving Andrew where he was before he heard them, except that he knew he was not alone.

Eighteen

In the next few days, Jesus began giving his students instructions on how to behave as his “emissaries,” without spelling out what he meant by his sermon, and without answering the myriad questions that they had. He simply assumed that, whether they understood him or not, they were still on his side, and that the advent of the Kingdom would explain all. Andrew fervently hoped so.

Andrew, of course, was paired with Simon, who professed not to have a problem with what Jesus had said—which confirmed Andrew in his suspicion—his certainty!—that Simon was anything but a paragon of intelligence, for all his “tongue,” and ability to handle lawyers.

Jesus gave them some pointers on what to do if people rejected their preaching. And it seemed that they also were to have the miraculous powers—at least some of them—that Jesus had, and this was a terrifying prospect. Andrew did not relish

the thought of confronting someone who had a demon. Suppose he drove it out, and it entered him! Of course, Jesus would be watch over them.

He hoped. No, of course, he would.

If he was what Andrew thought he was.

But of *course* he was.

Was he not?

Shortly afterwards, they began their mission, haltingly explaining to people that God was about to begin his reign, and that this would involve a new way of thinking, and to show that life would be different, they cured diseases themselves “in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”

Simon, who had the tongue, did most of the talking, and Andrew made confirmatory remarks every now and then, and just stood by, huge and reassuring. At any rate, people, who had heard about Jesus, were ready and even eager to listen to them, and had, of course, thousands of questions, most of which were fairly easy to answer, since they were of the type, “Did he really do X, Y, and Z? Did you actually see it?”

And then there were the cures. The two became very popular once it was discovered that they too could perform miraculous cures. And then there was the demon. Andrew was the one they brought the man to, and he placed his hand on the head of the man who roared at him, and told the demon to leave in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

The man stopped, and looked up at him for a moment, and said, “You two are a pair, you are! See how they love one another!” and he laughed a demonic laugh while he threw the man down to the ground, leaving him unconscious for a moment or two. But when he woke, he was in his right mind,

and had no memory of what he had done.

“What was *that* all about?” said Simon later.

Andrew reddened. “I know not. They are sons of the Father of lies, are they not? They are trying to drive a wedge between us.”

Simon looked at him with, for a moment, a touch of skepticism, and then said. “You must be right. You do *not* have a problem with me, do you? If so, tell me, and I will try to do what I can to help.”

“Fear not, Simon. Nothing you do bothers me.” This was true. It was what he *was*, the older but less capable brother, that bothered Andrew. And the solution to this problem probably had something to do with what Jesus said on the mountain, about turning the other cheek and so on. But Andrew had not yet divined how to change his thinking into conformity with it.

If he ever would. But it was not Simon’s fault.

And he *did* have the tongue.

At evening, they would return to the group, and report what they had done and said, receiving Jesus’ commendation, and advice how to deal with this or that difficulty some of them encountered. Simon mentioned the demon, and what he had said, and that Andrew’s answer was that he was in league with the father of lies.

“He is indeed,” answered Jesus. “Remember, they are totally helpless before you—and me—and they know it, and are losing their power over their victim; and they resent it bitterly. But since they can *do* nothing but obey you, they will try to turn the tables on you verbally. You must keep in mind that the truth is something they care nothing for, and you should put

no credence in anything they say.”

Unfortunately, thought Andrew, there was a certain truth in the lie they told, though Simon was not really astute enough to catch it. But what could he do about it? He did not wish Simon any ill, exactly; only that he himself would be able to shine as he knew he could shine, and not be constantly in the shadow of his brother. What was wrong with that?

And yet the demon seemed to think there was something there, something that he could use. And it *was* something, because it did drive a wedge between them. If Simon were not his brother, and were not usurping, as it were, the place he could have based on his talents, then Andrew would not resent him, would he? He would wish him well, and hope that he became more skilled in what he was doing.

And did he not do this? He tried to tell himself he did, but could not make a convincing case for it, because what Simon did always seemed to reflect somehow on him; his success seemed to lessen Andrew somehow, he knew not how.

The problem was in there, somewhere; but he did not clearly see what it was, let alone how to solve it, if it *was* a problem.

Bah! The demon was a liar, that was all.

Was it not?

One day, before they set out, the whole group was together, when a young man, dressed in even finer linen than Nathanael was accustomed to wearing (and which he still wore, though now it was not so well kept), understated in only the way that those accustomed to great wealth could do, came up and knelt before Jesus. “Good teacher,” he said, “What should I do to gain eternal life?”

“Why are you calling me ‘good?’” said Jesus. “No one is good except the one God.” This was almost a rebuke. Strange.

Jesus was continuing, “—keep the commandments: You are not to kill, you are not to commit adultery, you are not to testify falsely, you are not to defraud; honor your father and mother.”

The boy answered, “Teacher, I have done all this from the time I was very young.”

Jesus now looked fondly at him, and said, “Then there is one thing left for you to do. If you want to be perfect, then go, sell what you have and give the money to the poor, and this will open for you an account in heaven’s bank; and then come and follow me.”

Andrew immediately glanced over at Matthew, who had been struggling with this very problem. Matthew saw that the episode applied to him, and it concerned him immensely, based on the look on his face.

The boy’s face also fell. He looked down at his clothes, and surveyed the others around Jesus (even Matthew had taken to wearing quite ordinary clothing, not to stand out), and after a long pause, turned and walked off. Though interestingly, thought Andrew, now that he had seen Nathanael and this man, Matthew’s clothes beforehand, while elegant, were nowhere near what Nathanael or this man wore—probably because he did not want to seem *too* rich as he fleeced the people.

Jesus gazed after him, wistfully, and said, “How hard it is for a rich man to put himself under God’s rule! It is harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to subject himself to God!”

Matthew gasped in shock. And Thomas, who had caught a different nuance from the episode, had his hand over wineskin he had “hidden,” which everyone knew about. Could he give it up?

If you want to be perfect, give up what you held dear. Did that mean that Andrew was to give up the relation he had developed with Simon? He supposed he would do it gladly, but how? And what was it that had to be given up? All he wanted was simple justice, was it not?

Was it?

If not, what *was* it?

At this point, Simon blurted, “But then who can be saved?”

“With men, it is impossible,” answered Jesus. “But everything is possible with God.” Andrew thought, Well, it is certainly impossible for *me*, since I know not even what is wrong, if anything. Which means that I must leave it to God—which is to say, Jesus.

Simon replied to what Jesus said, “Yes it is! Look at us! We have left everything and followed you!” Why did statements like that make Andrew cringe?

“Amen I tell you,” said Jesus, taking no offense, but treating Simon as if he were serious, “that those of you who have followed me, when everything is reborn, when the Son of Man assumes the throne of his glory, will yourselves be seated on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel! And everyone who has left his house or his brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property for my sake will receive a hundred times as much in this age—along with persecution—and in the next age will enjoy eternal life! And yet” he added, looking around, “many of those who are now in the first place will be last, and many of the last will be first.”

Andrew notice that Thomas now looked worried—sharing his own worry—and Matthew now had a look of resignation—fear, but resignation. He went up to Jesus shortly afterward, and after a short conversation, left the group. Thomas had not yet the courage to get rid of the wineskin; he apparently still needed it just in case things became desperate. Well, Jesus knew of it, he was certain, and had not told Thomas he must get rid of it; it was not really the same as wealth. Doubtless his time would come. Andrew, too, did not yet have to give up what was holding him back from perfection—partly because he was not sure what it was. It was all very confusing.

They were headed north, for some reason, toward Philip’s Caesarea (as distinguished from the Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where Herod had his palace, and where Pontius Pilate lived when he was not in Jerusalem in that fortress they called the “Antonia.”). As they walked along, Jesus asked, as if casually, “Tell me; who do people say that I am?”

The Emissaries, of course, had heard much in their missions, and so some answered, “A prophet,” others, “The prophet foretold by Scripture,” and of course others, “The Prince.”

“And who do *you* say that I am?” asked Jesus, looking at them intently, as if their answer would be crucial. At this Andrew’s brother Simon blurted—again, “The Prince, the Son of the living God!”

Everyone was taken aback, not least Jesus. It was apparently the answer he was waiting for, but the source seemed to surprise him. He stroked his beard, and said, “Good for you, Simon Bar-Jona! Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you; it was my heavenly Father!”

Andrew was convinced that Simon had hit on this formulation by pure accident, but it was the one that Jesus was waiting for—or if he was not expecting it as such, he recognized it as inspired by “my heavenly Father” as soon as he heard it. Simon! Why could it not have been someone—anyone!—else?

“—are Rock,” Jesus was saying. Rock? “and on this rock I will build my community! And the gates of the world below will not close down upon it! And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of God, and whatever you lock on earth will be locked in heaven, and whatever you unlock on earth will be unlocked in heaven!”

Great heaven! Apparently, the one who hit upon the right way to say who Jesus was was to be the head of all of them! The one with “the keys of the Kingdom of God,” so that whatever he locked on earth would be locked in heaven! He! And did not Jesus have some inkling of this right at the beginning? As soon as he caught sight of Simon with Andrew, did he not say, “You are Simon, son of John; you will be called Kephas, ‘rock!’”

Apparently, he knew something back then, but something vague, which prompted him to use this peculiar term. He knew he was to be singled out somehow, but did not yet have an explicit notion of how and for what. Now he recognized it. Simon was to be the head of them all, and to control heaven as well as earth!

God save us all!, thought Andrew. But of course, God had

done this! What was there about *Simon*, of all people, that would qualify him to be their chieftain—or rather, the second-in-command, behind Jesus. Even Jesus was taken aback when he heard it!

In the back of his mind during all of this, there was the unspoken thought that Andrew was in so many ways *much* more qualified than Simon to be the proxy for Jesus whenever Jesus was not present—as he had in fact acted, and competently so, already! But he did not quite dare to articulate this even to himself; it was but a feeling, a new kind of resentment at his situation in relation to Simon.

What he *did* consciously think was that now, he would have to work hard at subordinating himself to this—this substandard “leader,” and probably help him to make the right decisions as he had helped him to be more skillful as a fisherman. And *he* would get the credit, while Andrew, who worked in the background, would fade into nothingness before him!

He could not *bear* it! He *would* not bear it!

He *would* bear it, he knew; he would have to.

He was beginning to see what his problem was—if there was a problem. Why should he resent it if Simon were Rock, and Andrew a mere pebble? How did Simon’s elevation diminish him? He was what he had always been. True, what he had always been, always in the shadow of his brother! It was not that Simon’s elevation made him less than he was; it was—it was that it made him *appear* less than he really was.

But he was still what he was, whether people recognized it or not, was he not? But it rankled that people would not recognize it.

Well, what is is what it is. Even Jesus was surprised by it and doubtless was devising ways in which he could bring it about that Simon would be able to be the foundation-stone on which he built his community. It would take some doing to make it a firm foundation, and not something like shale, ready to fall apart at the least blow! Still, that was Jesus’s problem

And not Andrew's? He knew in many ways how to handle Simon. He would have to be instrumental in building him up and not letting him make a fool of himself, without taking over himself or letting it be known that he was behind Simon's wise moves.

Gall and wormwood! If only it had been Philip instead, so that he did not have any responsibility toward him!

But *now* what was happening?

Jesus was saying "Be aware that the Son of Man must one day go to Jerusalem and suffer a great deal there at the hands of the priests and Scripture scholars, and be put to death, but will come to life on the third day afterwards."

Everyone gasped with shock. Suffer! Put to death! And what could "come to life on the third day" mean? Would he really be killed and return to life? "Destroy this Temple, and in three days, I will rebuild it!"

Had the one "my Father in heaven" inspired to say what Jesus really was shown Jesus that his quest for the transformation of the world—at least as he had envisioned it—was doomed to failure? God forbid! But God was hinting that he would permit it! It could not be. It *could* not!

But he was terrified that it was. What would they do? What good was the Rock if Jesus was to be killed? How good a foundation could he possibly be if what *made* him stone was gone?

And of course, this newly-named "Rock," feeling his authority, went up to him and said, "God forbid, Master! This will never happen to you!"

Jesus turned to him half in disgust and half in resignation, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path! You think as men do, not as God thinks!"

The Rock moved to the back of the group, and if ever a man had his tail between his legs, he had. Andrew was glad, but at the same time embarrassed for his brother. Clearly, what he was trying to "unlock" on earth was not going to be unlocked in heaven.

Everyone else also was struck dumb. No one, including Andrew, could make head or tail of the whole incident. It *could* not mean what it sounded as if it meant.

But it did, Andrew was convinced. He was going to be killed. And he could not escape the inference that it had something to do with Simon's being the one that made the correct answer. "My Father in heaven" was telling everyone, Jesus included, that picking this—this incompetent, let us face it!—meant that the Great Proposal of redeeming the world by restoring the state before Adam's fall was doomed.

Then was the world itself doomed? But God did nothing in vain. Some other way would be found to redeem the world—presumably some way that would be not as spectacular, and perhaps more painful—Perhaps! He was going to be killed! The whole thing was going to be a failure! But he would "return to life on the third day," whatever that meant.

But it sounded as if the world would not be destroyed because it rejected Jesus as King. But it would be punished somehow, as Adam and his offspring were punished. But it was conceivable, at least, that the state Jesus came to establish—or something like it—would still come to pass, somehow, after the punishment. Perhaps the world had to "die" also and then come back to life afterward. That phrase, "return to life on the third day" was a message of hope. Either Jesus would literally die and literally come back among them, or what he said was a metaphor for his Kingdom's death and restoration, or some such thing.

It was not hopeless, then; it was merely terrifying.

James, nearby, came into his consciousness as he was shaking his head, saying to John. "I understand less and less as the days go on! *This* I cannot even bear to think about! —But going back to what you were saying about preparation to clarify 'son of the living God,' I know that you and Andrew have been giving it much thought."

“You have no idea, I think,” he answered. “But we should leave that to him. He seems to be going about it gradually, and as events unfold, it will become clearer. It is incredible, if we are right; I still cannot really—I do not wish to say ‘believe’ it, because I believe it and I do not believe it. It seems impossible, and yet who are we to say what the Infinite God cannot do?”

“You mean that you think that he *is* God? The infinite God, who has a name we dare not pronounce?”

“He told me as much in the beginning, James, when he also told me things he could not have known otherwise.”

“I know that he is far greater than any prophet, even Moses. Moses never said anything on his own authority, as he did on the mountain there. ‘You have heard it said,’ as it was in the Law, ‘but I tell you.’ Remember that?”

“Indeed I do. *I* think it is because the whole world is—was—going to be transformed into what Isaiah predicted.”

“And you believe that that was not simply poetry?”

“Put it this way: I would not be surprised if it were not.”

“You are talking about a new creation!”

“Well, what are we witnessing? Look at what *we ourselves* can do!”

“You know, you have been making explicit things that have been in the back of my mind that I have not dared really think upon. There is so *much* I dare not think upon!”

“I imagine all of us will be forced to do so—and soon, if things progress as they have been. But I really wish that it had been Andrew who had said what the Rock said! But, as I know from my own case, and can guess from what I know of others—Thomas, for instance—he does not choose people on the basis of their qualifications, but as we have discussed, on their needs. He can do anything with anybody.”

“I fondly hope so,” said James. “You have no idea how much I hope so!” John looked at him.

There was a pause. Andrew glowed with the praise John had heaped upon him. But following what John was saying, he thought, He can do anything with anybody—who cooperates. But what of those who do not?

John went on, “If he can bring the dead back to life, then I suppose he can make Simon into a Rock to build his community upon. One would never have been able to imagine it, but presumably he created Simon in the first place.” Simon would certainly try to cooperate, especially now after this rebuke. Presumably, a lapse or two did not destroy things.

“He what?” said James, astonished.

“This is one of the implications Andrew and I have been toying with.”

“Good heavens!” He was silent at the implication that Jesus in a sense existed before Simon (who was a year older than he), and actually caused Simon to exist. Finally, he said, “Then it is certainly true that much more preparation is required!”

“Well, we shall see. Perhaps one day he will even explicitly say that he was in existence before he was born. That will establish that Andrew and I were on the right track.”

Well, at least it seemed, thought Andrew, as John and James parted, that John and he were headed in the right direction—whatever that meant. It seemed now that the “right direction” was the direction toward total disaster—with something afterward. It was all totally confusing and dispiriting.

Anyhow, a little thing like being subordinate in people’s opinion to Simon was overwhelmed by the tremendous implication in Jesus’s prediction that he would be killed, confirmed by his rebuke to Simon, who had equivalently said, “Ah, Master, you are simply making metaphors again. Explain yourself!”

Nineteen

THAT evening, Matthew came back. David immediately ran up to him and asked something. Andrew saw John wander over in their direction, and stop near Thomas and Ezra, who had apparently been eavesdropping. It was uncanny how so striking a man could remain unnoticed. Andrew decided to hear the news, and went behind a bush beside the path.

“What was that all about?” asked Thomas.

“Interesting,” said Ezra. “David—he and I are beginning to become friends, by the way—asked if he had been successful in whatever it was he was doing. ‘I know not whether to call it “successful,” David,’ he answered. ‘I am poor now, you see.’”

“David, amazed, and, I think, disappointed, said, ‘Poor?’ And he answered, ‘I gave my house to Gideon and gave him his freedom; and the money I had hoarded I asked him to distribute among the farmers and people I had defrauded—because, frankly, I could not bring myself to do it; I could not bear to see myself parting with all that wealth. He is going to keep back enough to live on, but all the rest is going to be given away—except for this, which is for all of us.’”

And he showed him a heavy sack he was carrying under his cloak.

“The intriguing thing was that David took this as if it were a blow. He looked at Matthew with a *very* strange expression. Matthew said, ‘Be of good cheer, David, as I am trying to be, and trust in the Master. I *must* do so now, it seems.’

“And David answered, ‘I—know not what to say.’ It looked as if the purpose of his life had been thwarted, somehow. Was he plotting to steal what Matthew had? Fascinating.”

Ah, so the “new Matthew” was the real Matthew now. He had to be. Andrew wondered whether, like Thomas, he had kept a secret cache somewhere, just in case—of course, he had not heard about Simon as Rock, and Jesus’s prediction that he would be killed. But one never knew.

Thomas and John were now joined by Matthew, and began to explain what had happened while he was away. Andrew wandered off by himself to think.

Or to feel. A great cloud hovered over him, and he was crushed by its weight, without explicitly knowing what it was; it was just there, and he could barely move under it—or through it—it was like trying to walk under water, except there was no buoying up, as there was with water; it was simply a liquid obstacle that found its way into his lungs, making it all but impossible to breathe.

Suddenly, John’s voice broke in, “Oh, incidentally, we are to go to Judea tomorrow, for the festival.”

“Ah yes,” answered Thomas. “All the excitement over this had driven it out of my head.” As it had with Andrew. He now vaguely remembered Jesus’s speaking of it; but the tremendous events of the road to Caesarea had overwhelmed it. Well, it would doubtless be a step in Jesus’s revelation of who he was, and in the Judeans’ likely rejection of it, if his prediction meant anything.

Why could it not have been *anyone* but Simon? Simon Rock! How absurd! But then, the whole world was absurd!

They arrived in Jerusalem a few days later toward evening, and

went again to the garden on the Mount of Olives to sleep, after Jesus had sent word to a friend of his who lived nearby in Bethany, named Lazarus, that he had arrived in the area, and would dine with him and his sister Martha as usual on the morrow.

The next morning, they crossed the Kidron brook and went back into the city, going around the wall for some reason, and entering from the north by the Sheep Gate.

Andrew was a little nonplused at the extended walk, because it was a Sabbath; but Jesus evidently had a purpose. He paused at the Bethesda Pool nearby, walking—briefly—along the five porches that surrounded it, looking with pity on the blind, sick, lame and paralyzed people lying there, but doing nothing for a while. Tradition had it that at irregular intervals, the water would be disturbed—some said by an angel—and the first person to enter the water when this happened would be cured.

Finally, Jesus saw something that looked like the opportunity his Father was providing, since he stroked his beard and stopped by a paralyzed man, who had obviously been lying there a long time. Matthew asked someone how long he had been sick, and was told, “Thirty-eight years, if I recall correctly.”

Jesus looked down at him and said, “Would you like to be cured?”

“Master,” said the man, who had no idea who the person speaking to him was, “I do not have anyone to put me in the pool when the water churns up; and while I am going there myself, someone else gets in before me.” He would have had to drag himself along by his hands; everything below his waist was completely useless.

“Stand up,” said Jesus. “Take your mat, and walk.”

And the man suddenly became well. He leaped up and picked up the mat he was lying on and began walking about, praising God. He was too excited at first even to turn and thank Jesus, who watched him for a while and withdrew.

Now Andrew saw what was afoot. Jesus had performed a cure on the Sabbath, and a cure that involved a paralyzed man, whom he told to get up *and take his mat* and walk. The *cure* was perfectly innocent, because he simply told him to stand up and walk, and there was nothing against telling someone to do something. Nor was there anything against standing up and walking. But carrying the mat would be regarded as work.

The dilemma for the Pharisees was that it would be absurd for the man to leave his mat there until the next day, because it would not be where he left it. But if he carried it, he was working on the Sabbath—at least according to the Pharisees' definition of "work."

John caught what was going on, and said as much to Thomas. "What?" answered Thomas. "He *did* nothing." John noticed that also. He cured by simply telling the man to walk; but the Pharisees would not see it that way. Yet it would make them look foolish to the people if they brought it up.

And, though Jesus had gone on into the Temple, it was not long before the Pharisees saw the man walking about and said to him, "It is a Sabbath. You are not allowed to be carrying your mat."

"But the one who cured me," said the man, "told me to take my mat and walk."

"Who is this man who told you to carry things and walk with them?"

"I know not. He was there at the pool."

"Find him. We have several things to say to him."

The man began looking about, and finally, followed by Thomas and Ezra, went into the Temple, which was not far away.

Andrew was of two minds whether to follow them, as, apparently was John, but shortly, the man came out and met one of the people he had talked to before, and said, "The man who cured me was in there. I was not looking for him, but he found me. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the one people are calling a prophet."

"Prophet indeed! Prophets keep the Sabbath! Is he still there?"

“As far as I know,” said the man.

The Pharisee, in great dudgeon, entered, with John and Andrew following, and found Jesus, surrounded by a number of people, and snapped, “What is this that we have been hearing and seeing? You perform cures on the Sabbath and tell a man to carry his mat and walk?”

Jesus looked over calmly at him and replied, “My Father has been working right up until now; and now I am working also.” Andrew’s ears perked up. Jesus was referring to God as his Father. Would they catch the implication?

They did. “How dare you! You are all but calling yourself God! Beware! People have been stoned to death for less! And if you do such things, you have no right to do them on the Sabbath!”

“Amen amen I tell you,” said Jesus, “the Son can do nothing by himself; he only does what he sees the Father doing; what he does, the Son does in the same way. But the fact is that the Father loves the Son, and shows him everything he is doing.” Meaning, the Father can do what he pleases on the Sabbath, and if he does it, so do I. Who but the Father could cure a man paralyzed for decades? But I did it. And if it was done on the Sabbath, who are you to say that I must not do it?

And Jesus went on, “And he will show him even greater things than this, and you will be amazed. Just as the Father brings the dead back and gives them life, the Son will give life to anyone he pleases.”

So Jesus was using this to introduce the people to the notion that he had to *be* God in order to be able to do these things, and that *as* God he would do even more amazing things like bringing people such as David back to life from death. He had revived David, and everyone was amazed; he was now making more explicit that, if he could forgive sins and bring the dead back to life—on his own! Not like Elisha, but on his own! By a mere word!—he had to be one and the same as his Father. He was giving them their chance to accept his

true reality—but he knew it would be a waste of time.

Evidently, however, he had to give them the chance. He was saying, “—time is coming—has already arrived—when corpses will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who listen to it will live again. Just as the Father has eternal life in himself, he has given the Son the possession of eternal life in himself; and he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”

So he called himself the Son of God, and also the Son of Man; and he has the possession of eternal life in himself. Would he give us this eternal life? Even if he is rejected? At least would he give it to those of us who believed in who he really is?

Now the crowd was buzzing. One said, “So this ‘Son of Man’ is now the ‘Son of God,’ is he?” Another chimed in, “And we are supposed to hear his voice from the grave and come out and walk around? Ridiculous!” The first said, “He certainly has a low opinion of himself, has he not?” A man standing in front of him turned around, and said, “Well, he *did* make a crippled man completely well with just a word. I saw it; he simply said, ‘Stand up and walk,’ and he did!”

“So?” said the first speaker. “Curing a disease is one thing. But this bringing the dead to life and claiming to be the Son of God is something else!”

“Be quiet! He is still speaking!”

“—were simply acting as a witness for myself, my testimony would be worthless. But there is someone else who has testified about me, and I know how solid his evidence about me is. You yourselves sent people to John, and he gave testimony that was true. I have no need of human testimony; I am saying this for you to be rescued. He was a burning,

shining lamp, and you people found pleasure for a while in his light.”

“Who is this ‘John’ he speaks of?” asked one. “You remember,” was the answer. He was down at the Jordan, bathing everyone. Some thought he was Elijah come to life again, and announcing that the Prince God anointed had arrived.” “Ah, and this one is saying *he* is the Prince!” “Well, he has not exactly *said* so as yet, but one can see where he is headed.” “But of course, you see,” said the one who had objected at first, “if he is the Prince, he is the son of David. But this one is calling himself the Son of the Master Himself!”

“—Father himself is a witness on my behalf—though you have never heard his voice or seen his form.”

“You see?” said the objector, and then shouted at Jesus, “Neither have you, my friend!”

“—what he says has no home in you is clear from the fact that you do not believe in the one he sent. Search the Scriptures, since you think that there is where you will have eternal life. They are evidence about me. But you refuse to come to me and have life!”

“I find nothing about Nazareth and Galilee in the Scriptures!” said someone. “Why should I come to you?”

“I care nothing about what people think of me; but I know you; you do not have the love of God in you. I came in my Father’s name, and you will not accept me. If someone else were to come in his own name, you would accept him. How can you believe me, if you simply take what everyone else thinks about a person and do not try to find out the opinion of the one true God?”

“Well, we certainly are not going to take the opinion of

the one who is standing before us!” muttered a man standing next to Matthew and John. “His opinion of himself is a bit too exalted for a lowly Scripture scholar like myself to be able to agree with.” Others were voicing similar sentiments, and they drowned out Jesus for a while.

He was going on, “—Moses, the one you set your hopes on. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But if you will not believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?”

No, he knew they would never accept him. To win over the Pharisees was hopeless. At best, they might accept him as Judas was accepting him: as someone who had “God” flowing through him as a kind of power, but not someone who *is* God, certainly not someone who is God as a person—a person somehow distinct from Jesus, but not distinct in reality: “The Father and I are one and the same thing,” John had told Andrew he said.

But Judas had said to Simon, who had raised the possibility that he *is* God, “You can see how absurd that is, I hope.” The Pharisees most apt to be on Jesus’s side would probably have something like Judas’s attitude. But Jesus was going to have to prove them wrong; he was going to have to make it clearer and clearer that the Father and he were one and the same thing somehow, really one and the same.

But this meant, did it not? that Judas would need to be watched. Either he would “change his way of thinking” and accept that God was utterly beyond his feeble attempts to rationalize him, or he would try to fit him into his theory somehow, and explain what Jesus was saying as a delusion on his part. It would be interesting to see how Judas would

manage this. A “delusion”! How laughable!

But as to Jesus and the Judeans, perhaps he could win over the ordinary people, who saw the signs, and saw that they were signs, and saw what the signs so clearly—if one but used one’s eyes!—signified.

But then would the ordinary people reject the rejection by their authorities, their wise mentors, and follow Jesus? It was possible, but it would not happen, in the last analysis. He had predicted it would not.

Then why was he doing this? Because he had to give them the chance to accept him. And he was doubtless going to make a more and more convincing case, and make their rejection more absurd than the apparent absurdity they would be asked to accept.

And the same would go for Judas. Would he cling to his “reason,” and refuse to accept the evidence of his senses? Or would he change his way of thinking? Evidently, Jesus was giving *him* the chance also, whether he would be willing to accept him, or whether he would somehow be instrumental in his rejection. Jesus deluded! How absurd! But Andrew was willing to wager that it would not seem absurd to Judas.

Andrew was about to witness the second Fall of Man.

But Jesus’s reference to Moses apparently ended what everyone had to say, since no one came up to arrest him. Of course, how could they? On what grounds? For saying something? Still, their hatred was palpable.

The students then went with Jesus down the road to Bethany, about an hour’s walk away. The host, a man named Lazarus, a banker Jesus had met a year or two earlier, greeted them all in a friendly, if distant, manner. He was extremely

fastidious; his robes were impeccable, and his manners elegant, but Andrew saw immediately that he was a fool, for all his manners. He treated Jesus as one would a clown, for his entertainment-value. His sister Martha, however, was the picture of sincere cordiality and intelligence, and evidently was the main mover behind these invitations.

Martha and Matthew were engaged in a rather extended conversation. Lazarus, when he heard that Matthew had been a tax-collector, almost lost his demeanor as a host, and proceeded, after barely acknowledging his existence, to keep himself to the other side of the room.

“Yes, he is amazing, is he not?” Martha was saying to Matthew. She swelled with pride. “I persuaded Lazarus to invite him to dine whenever he is in Judea, and he comes! And he has told me,” she lowered her voice confidentially, “that he will find my sister for me and bring her back, if she is willing; or if not, will give me news of her!”

“Your sister has been lost?”

“These many years. We lost her, I remember, the day our rabbi’s house burned down and his poor, dear crippled wife died in the fire. He has not been the same since, poor man. Nor have we, because of our sister. We searched and searched, but never found a trace of her. But I cannot believe that she is dead, and the Master has all but confirmed it!”

“I am sorry for the loss.”

“But do not be. The Master will see to it that everything will be explained and turn out well.”

“Well I hope for your sake that it happens.”

“Oh, it will happen. I am sure of it.”

They had a very elaborate dinner, with Lazarus giving all

his attention to Jesus and another banker friend beside him, clearly to avoid looking at, and still more conversing with, anyone else. He obviously endured all this for two reasons: because his sister insisted, and because he suspected that Jesus might turn out to be famous, and it might be politic to have him as a friend.

After the dinner, they were seated about, talking, and Jesus said, "This banquet made me think of a story." (He had lately begun speaking more often analogies and stories.) "There once was a rich man who wore richly dyed clothes of the finest linen, and who dined sumptuously every day. A poor man named Lazarus—" he glanced over at Lazarus, in his richly-dyed linen robe, "—with a body full of pustules, used to lie by his gate, hoping to feed off what had been left on the rich man's plates. Even the dogs would come and lick his sores." Lazarus made a face at the image.

"Finally the poor man died and was carried by angels to the place of honor in Abraham's banquet," At this, Lazarus' began to take notice. "And the rich man died too and was buried.

"He looked up from the land of the dead where he was suffering, and saw Abraham a long way off, and Lazarus next to him at the banquet.

"'Father Abraham!' he shouted. 'Be kind to me! Tell Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and come here to cool my tongue; I am in agony in these flames!'

"'Son,' said Abraham, 'remember: you had your good time while you were alive, and Lazarus had as bad a time. Now he is the one who has comfort, and you who suffer. Besides, there is a huge chasm set between all of you and us, and so not

even anyone who wanted to go from here to you could manage it, and no one can pass from there to here.’

“‘Then please, Father,’ he said, ‘send someone to my father’s house—I have five brothers—and warn them not to let themselves come to this place of torture!’

“‘They have Moses and the prophets,’ said Abraham. ‘They must listen to them.’

“‘They will not, father Abraham, but if someone were to come back to them from the grave, they would change heart.’

“He answered, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not believe it if a dead person comes back to life.’”

There it was. He knew that those who “will not listen to Moses and the prophets,” whom he had referred to in his controversy about the Sabbath with the Pharisees would not accept him even if he died and brought himself back to life!

But would the rest of us? *That* was the issue, was it not?

But, as Andrew could have predicted, the whole meaning of the story was completely lost on Lazarus. He was saying to his friend, “You see how he is? He tells these stories that do not have an atom of sense to them, and has everyone enthralled. Fascinating! I was hoping something like this would happen, to show you what he is like!”

“You took no offense that he used your name?” The friend, who obviously had caught the meaning of the story, was struggling to say something polite.

“Offense? I am flattered! I have never heard him use a name in his stories before; and after all, he put me in the place of honor beside Abraham himself!”

“To be sure he did,” said the friend. “Yes, I suppose he

did. ~~Of course—~~”
“Oh, now, do not go trying to make *sense* of it! He simply tells these things to amuse himself. And he amuses *me* also, since I see everyone racking their brains trying to plumb the profound meaning behind his stories, and there *is* no meaning; it is all a game of his!”

“If you say so.”

“Believe me, it is true. I have known him for quite some time, and he says the most outrageous things to shock people, but he is quite harmless, really. Once one sees this, it is a delight to be with him.”

Andrew wondered if this blockhead could be saved. *There* would be a miracle.

Twenty

On their way back to Galilee, they passed through Sychar once again, and the people welcomed Jesus, though he did not stay with them.

When they reached Mount Tabor, Jesus told them to wait at the foot, and climbed the mountain himself with the Rock, James, and John. Andrew wondered what this was about, and—of course—felt left out, since he was not invited to go. But this was doubtless something he would have to accustom himself to; the Rock, James, and John seemed to have become an elite team.

Conceivably, thought Andrew, this was not simple favoritism, though in John's case it seemed to be. But if Jesus selected the Twelve, not because of special talents—and, given who they were, that *had* to be the case—then it might be that these three, for some reason, needed special attention.

He fervently hoped that was what it was, although he could not fathom why John, of all people, would need constant

watching. But then, John seemed to think that he was on the brink of disaster à la Thomas, and so there might be something there.

In any case, why should it bother him if others were preferred to him? He was big and strong—and smart—but Jesus could make anyone do anything, provided the person was willing. And Andrew was willing, and he would wager as willing as any other of the Twelve.

But he was who he was, and anyone with eyes and a brain knew it, and so others' being preferred to him did not diminish his reality in the least. It was just that it bothered him; he could not help it.

Or could he?

Was that the problem? Was that the “change in the way you are thinking” that was demanded?

Well, Jesus was constantly saying that they had to trust him and not themselves, and so he would have to leave the solution up to Jesus. Perhaps it was just that, *because* he was so capable, he had been trusting in himself too much.

How odd! His trusting in himself had led him to mistrust himself!

As everyone waited at the bottom of the mountain, they were not unobserved by the crowds, which began to gather, even though they could see that Jesus was not there. And the inevitable diseased and crippled persons came up to be cured.

A man came up to Nathanael, who was at the edge of the group, as usual, and said to him, “Are you the followers of Jesus of Nazareth?” and when he told him they were, he said, “May I see him? My boy has an unclean spirit, and I need his help.”

Nathanael quaked. Andrew could sympathize; unclean spirits were not to be trifled with, in spite of the fact that they “were completely helpless,” and someone as naturally timid as Nathanael was bound to suffer in confronting them. He answered, in a voice of trepidation, “He is not here at the moment, though we expect him fairly soon. But perhaps we can help.” He obviously hoped the man would ask to wait.

“Oh, could you?” he exclaimed, and turned and his wife brought up their teen-age son, who was actually frothing at the mouth. Nathanael quaked at the sight of him; even Andrew, who was nearby, stepped back a pace or two.

The boy was struggling, looking off into space, and the father held him, while Nathanael said, “I command you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to leave this boy!”

Nothing happened.

Then the boy said, in a deep, rasping voice—clearly not his own—“Then where is he? He has deserted you, has he not?”

Nathanael, trying desperately to show that he was not shaking because he had not been obeyed, repeated, as forcefully as he knew how, “In Jesus’s name, I command you to leave that boy on the instant!”

You command me! *You!*” And then he laughed a demonic laugh—and did not go out of the boy. Nathanael was all but fainting, when Jesus came up, and suddenly there was a great silence. “What is it you are busying yourselves with?” he asked.

The man answered, “Rabbi, I brought you my son, who has a demon that will not let him speak; and when it gets inside him, it tears him apart, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth, and goes rigid. I asked your students if they would

drive it out, and they were not strong enough!” He gave a look at Nathanael, whose face was scarlet, but who looked as if he was going to faint.

“This faithless race!” exclaimed Jesus. Nathanael cowered and tried to withdraw into the background. “How long will I be among you? How long will I put up with you? Bring him to me!”

The father pulled him over, and the boy went into convulsions, and fell writhing on the ground. Jesus looked at him. “How long has he been this way?” he asked the father.

“From the time he was little!” he said. “And it often throws him into the fire, and into water to kill him! But if it is possible, please help us! Have pity on us!”

“If it is possible!” exclaimed Jesus. “Everything is possible to a believer.”

“Master I believe!” cried the man. “Please help my unbelief!”

Jesus, noticing that the crowd was gathering round them, said in a calm voice, “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you to go out of him.” And the boy suddenly gave out a roar, and fell over as if dead. Jesus then took his hand, and he stood up, and he gave him to his father.

Everyone was completely stunned, and no one said a word for a long time.

Finally, Simon the Revolutionary asked, “Why could we not drive it out?”

“Because you did not believe strongly enough,” answered Jesus. “Besides, that kind can only go out through fasting and prayer.”

Everyone was cowed, and said nothing. Nathanael was

trying to make himself as small and inconspicuous as possible. All of the students learned that it was not inevitable that they would control demons, and none of them seemed eager to make another attempt.

But after a while, it dawned on some of them that Jesus and the three were no longer on the mountain; whatever they were doing there was over—and it became abundantly clear that something tremendous had happened up there also, from the expressions on the faces of the companions. They seemed to be in shock; they had barely even reacted to the demon.

“What happened?” everyone asked, crowding around.

“We are not to speak of it,” said the Rock. “At least, not until . . . something happens which I do not understand.” He looked over at Jesus with awe and a kind of terror in his eyes. No one could extract any more from him. Whatever it was they had seen, it made them aware that this man they had been so familiar with was far, far beyond anything they could have imagined. And not only the Rock, but James and John looked at Jesus with a new expression of overwhelmed awe. Had Jesus walked out of his human skin for a few moments?

Andrew was about to approach Simon, but saw the look on his face and gave it up. He knew enough about Simon to realize that when he was in that state, and had promised to keep silence, there was no moving him. So he went after Nathanael instead, who had wandered off, and might need reassurance. And he seemed to be right. When he neared, he heard Nathanael say to himself, “I am no good at this! I am a complete failure, as I have been at everything! I will simply go and relieve them of my presence!” Andrew was afraid this might happen, and was about to hurry over, when Jesus

suddenly appeared beside him, and said, as if he had been there all the time, “Without even telling me?” Where had he come from?

“Master!” said Nathanael.

“Remember, I said that I did not ask for success, but that you try—or as Matthew said, that you try to try. You tried.”

“Not hard enough.”

“Come now. So you found out that we are not playing games here—as you suspected when you tried to cast out the demon. And you failed. But the boy is in his right mind. So what is the problem?”

“No thanks to me.”

“Oh? You want thanks?”

“It was simply an expression.”

“Think, Nathanael. What was the purpose here? That the boy be cured, or that you cover yourself in glory?”

“I did not mean it that way. That he be cured, of course.”

“And that was accomplished. So why are you thinking of leaving?”

“Because I keep covering myself in disgrace!”

“Oh? As you did when you saved the girl from drowning?” Earlier, he had dived into the lake as a young girl fell from a boat. He arrived on time, and handed her to those in the boat, and quickly swam to shore—embarrassed, for some reason, perhaps because everyone saw him naked.

“She was in no danger. You know that!”

“She *was* in danger, in fact. *That* I know. And you did not know that she was in no danger.”

“I did not think!”

“And if you had thought, and she *was* in danger—as she

was—would you have acted fast enough so that in fact the danger was averted?”

“But I can claim no credit for that!”

“Then can you claim blame for this? Fear not. Try to try. That is all I ask. And if you fail, I am not unhappy. And I will tell you a secret. If you try and you do fail, my Father will see to it that it is better thus.”

Nathanael looked at him, half with hope and half with skepticism. “Even with Samuel?”

“Even there. And you will learn this soon after *I* fail.”

“You? *You?*”

“Fear not, Nathanael All will be well. Fear nothing. Now come and join us and do not be silly.”

After *I* fail. So Andrew was right. The plan he originally had was doomed. But all would be well, even with Samuel. How could that be? Was Samuel to come back to life with Jesus? But that would be ridiculous! Thomas would have a twin brother two or three years younger than himself! No, there had to be a different meaning to this.

It was so *hard* to believe that all would be well!

But on the other hand, Jesus and the Father were one and the same thing; and the Father (presumably with Jesus, whatever that meant) had created the whole universe, and had absolute control over everything in it—including Samuel. And he had *said* all would be well even with Samuel, and that Nathanael would find it out, and so presumably, he knew what he was talking about.

We would find out the “how” in due time, and then we would all say, “Of course! How could I not have foreseen it!” But beforehand, it was like looking at the wrong side of a

tapestry, all knots and ends of yarn, with only the barest glimpses that there was a pattern on the other side.

But it gave Andrew hope. He could fail. If Jesus himself could fail, and all would be well, then Andrew could fail at this nebulous project he had, and it would not matter.

And he had learned this much: He, like Nathanael, was what he was, and what people thought of him was irrelevant. Eventually, in the Kingdom—or after he died, or whenever it was that everything made sense, all that would matter would be what he *was*, not what he seemed to be to others.

Easily said, but it was still completely unsatisfactory. He wanted to ask Jesus about it, but he did not have the difficulty clear enough in his head to be able to ask him anything. Well, Jesus was constantly saying that they had to have faith. He would have to have faith that this would be resolved, somehow. If the Samuel problem could be solved, then his problem could also be.

He trusted.

“Master, I believe! Please help my unbelief!” Was not this what the father of the demoniac said? It was why it came so readily to his mind. But it was enough.

The group walked along, by themselves for a change, since the crowds realized they had gone to Judea and were not expecting them back as yet. On the way, they paused, and Jesus, who was acting as if nothing had happened on the mountain, told them, “Attend carefully to this: The Son of Man is going to be surrendered into human hands, and they will kill him; and on the third day after that, he will return to life.”

Again. He was obviously serious about it, and wanted

them to brace themselves so that they would not be devastated when it happened.

How could they not be?

Andrew noticed Nathanael, rather frantically trying to find someone to talk to. He went to John, but received no satisfactory answer, in spite of whatever it was that John had seen on the mountain. Andrew was hoping he would come to him, so that he could clarify his own thoughts by talking to him, but he went to Judas instead. Andrew thought it might be a good idea to see if Judas had changed his “theory” of Jesus at all, based on what he had seen with the demon.

When Nathanael asked Judas, he said, “I fear he means what he says, Bartholomew. I fear it greatly. He has not mollified the authorities, and they can be—adamant—in certain respects, especially about blasphemy. And they think he has, if not actually blasphemed, come very close. Very close.”

“But what of this statement that he will return to life in three days?” Nathanael looked hopefully at him.

“Ah, well, that. I have a suspicion, Nathanael, that I would not like anyone to know of. But . . . You recall that when he drove the vendors out of the Temple he said, ‘Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will rebuild it?’”

“I remember. I could not make head or tail of it.”

“Nor I. But remember, he was pounding his chest with his hand when he said it. I think the ‘three days’ is significant; he has some kind of fixation on three days.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you see . . . Jonah was in the fish three days, was he not, and then emerged?”

“What has that to do with it?”

“What I think is this: I told you that it seems to me that the Activity that created the universe is acting through him. Well, I believe It—or ‘He,’ if you prefer—is possessing more and more of Jesus’s mind. He has begun calling himself the Son of God, just as that fool Simon the Rock did, rather than *a* son of God. We are all sons of God in a sense; we are created in his image, as Genesis says. But he is beginning to think that he is a *literal* Son of God: God from God, so to speak.”

“You are saying that he thinks, because of his power, that he *is* God in some sense.”

“You will notice that he does not call himself the Father; but I believe he is thinking of himself as God the Son. But he is intelligent enough—intelligent enough! He is far more intelligent than any other human being!—to realize that the Judean authorities are going to consider this blasphemy. *He* does not, because he thinks it is true; but he knows what *they* think, and he does not see a way he can convince them otherwise. He thinks they will kill him.”

“No!”

“I greatly fear so.”

“And then he will come back to life on the third day to prove that he was right and they were wrong.”

“That, Nathanael, is what I am convinced he thinks. And of course, if he is God the Son, he will do so. But—” and he did not finish the sentence.

“You think he is mistaken.”

“Tragically mistaken. The Activity that is possessing him has been driving him mad.”

“Unless he really is God the Son.”

“Yes, but you can see, I hope, that this is absurd. God is

a spirit, not something with flesh and bones.”

“I see,” said Nathanael.

Andrew thought as much. According to Judas, Jesus was going mad. But his theory was absurd. The demon that Andrew drove away *knew* things.

True, demons talked through the voice of the men they possessed, but what they said did not come from the men; the demons could *think*. They were persons, not “forces.” And if *they* were persons, then whatever “possessed” the body of Jesus was also a person, not a “force.”

And anyway, if Jesus was “being driven mad” by this “force” that was acting “through” him, he was mad at the very beginning. He told John at the very outset that he and the Father “were one and the same thing”—and John, as he was announcing him, in effect said the same: The “God in God’s bosom,” or some such expression. Certainly *John* was not being driven mad by the “force” that was prompting him to announce Jesus.

No, Judas had let his theory blind himself to the obvious. Jesus was not “possessed” by the Father; or if he was, the Father and he were (was?) lying.

Not to mention that he had apparently *shown* what he was on the mountain just now—presumably, to the people who most needed to be convinced of it. *They* had no doubt that the Father was not an impersonal “force.”

No, the answer was that *Judas* was the deluded one. It had to be. The question was what Judas would now do, believing as he believed. Could he still be made to change his way of thinking? It did not seem so. And if not, he was dangerous.

Twenty-One

The next day, they crossed the “sea” for some reason, this time all of them in Simon Rock’s boat, which his father lent him for the day; it was large enough so that all twelve of them fit comfortably on benches on the sides (the center was for practical purposes empty for the casks that held the fish they had caught in water until they reached the shore). Jesus sat on the bench in the stern, which had a cushion on it, making it a kind of couch, and then, saying he would take a bit of a rest, lay down and fell asleep, his head near Nathanael, who was on the side toward the stern. Andrew, who was opposite Nathanael, looked with amusement at him gripping the gunwale with white knuckles. Andrew, of course, had plenty of experience in being out on the lake even in a storm—sudden storms were common there—and he had forgotten how frightening it had been the first couple of times.

And it looked as if a storm was about to hit them now.

Suddenly, the rain came and the lightning, and the wind blew a ferocious gale, and the boat rocked fiercely. It clearly terrified Nathanael, who now held on to the gunwale at the side and the stern, looking at Jesus, hoping that he would wake and do something to save them. But he slept on.

Finally, water began slopping over the sides, and Andrew and Simon the Revolutionary began bailing. The storm seemed to be getting worse and worse, and Jesus slept on.

Nathanael finally could bear it no longer, and in panic, he cried out to Jesus, “Master, does it not bother you that we are going to drown?”

Jesus woke, looked out at the storm, and said, “Be quiet! Calm yourself!”

And suddenly, the wind dropped and all was still.

He looked at Nathanael, and with a mock-stern voice, but a smile on his face, said, “Why did you doubt, you people who have so little faith?”

“What sort of a man is this?” said James to John, who was beside him at the oars, as they looked up at the blue sky. “Even the wind and the sea obey him!”

But adventures were not over for that day. On the shore they were confronted with another madman, this one naked, full of cuts and scrapes, with fetters and chains that he had broken. He ran up screaming in that demonic voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torture me!”

“What is your name?” said Jesus.

“Legion. There are many of us. Please, please do not send us away into the abyss!”

Nathanael cowered to the back of the group—

understandably enough, based on what had happened with the other demoniac. Jesus just stood there calmly as the demons pleaded and begged for mercy. He was looking around.

His eyes lighted on a herd of hogs grazing next to a nearby cliff overlooking the lake. The man saw where he was looking, and the demon inside him pleaded, "Please! Send us into the pigs! Let us enter them!"

"You may go," said Jesus and with a roar, they left and the hogs suddenly went wild. The whole herd rushed around for a moment, and then threw itself over the cliff into the water and drowned.

Everyone looked on in shock, not least the man out of whom they had gone. Multiple demons could be in a person! The swineherds, who of course were Gentiles, looked over the cliff at the destruction, and ran off. Jesus, meanwhile, asked if someone had an extra cloak and tunic, and covered the naked man, with whom he began a one-sided conversation. It was clear that the man, though no longer insane, was so terrified at what had happened that he could not speak more than a word or two. Jesus was trying to reassure him. Then, when the townsfolk came up, they cried, "Leave us! Leave us! Have mercy!" looking on the madman with fear.

"Master, will you leave?" he said. "May I go with you?"

"No, my friend. Go back to your home, and explain to everyone what God has done for you." And Jesus and his companions got back into the boat, crossing over to Capernaum. Jesus looked at Nathanael smiled an amused smile.

Andrew, who had himself been almost unmanned by the encounter, especially the sight of the huge herd of pigs which had gone completely berserk, was inclined to sympathize more

fully with Nathanael. It was one thing to be afraid of the storm, but quite another to be afraid of these powers of hell. Jesus had no fear of them, but anyone but Jesus was but a cockroach in comparison to them; and it would be nothing for them simply to step on him—or enter him.

Did one have to give them permission? Or could they just take over oneself?

That evening, as the group was on the road near Magdala by the “Sea” of Galilee, Jesus suddenly shouted “Stop!” at a woman who had just emerged from the shadows, and looked as if she might fall off the cliff.

There was a brief pause, where everything was frozen, and then the woman said, in a rasping man’s voice, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? She is ours!” Another one! This time a woman!

Then the woman slowly approached Jesus, as if she were being dragged toward him. She was exceedingly beautiful, and, incredibly, the very picture of innocence. Andrew gasped and involuntarily stirred at the sight of her. But the voice! That put a stop to all attraction.

Everyone moved aside in fear. This gave promise, if possible, to be even worse than Legion!

“Ἐλείσον ἐμὲ ὧς υἱὸς τοῦ ὑψίστου θεοῦ!” she said in that same male voice, and Jesus snapped, “Be silent! You will answer only when spoken to, no more; you will speak the truth for once, and only in Aramaic.” Andrew wondered what she had said. It sounded like Greek.

“Yes, Master. Good master,” answered the voice. The woman began groveling in the dust like a dog awaiting punishment.

“Refrain from calling me good.” barked Jesus. “What do you know of good? How many are you?”

“We are seven, Master, only seven.”

“Does she know you?”

“Oh, yes, merciful Master. She invited—”

She cringed and groveled again in the dirt of the roadway, “It was not truly a lie, merciful Master. She did not refuse us—”
 “I will engage in no disputations with you. Is she listening now? Can she hear us?”

“Yes, Master.”

“She is to know how you entered her. Explain it.”

“As I said, Master, she did not refuse us. It was our right, and we were not forbidden, as happens so often with us. ~~She~~ Stop! In your description of how you entered her, you are to speak in such a way that she alone will understand what you did to her. These others need not know—and are not to know—what she did.”

“But it was her cursing God that opened the door. We could not have entered without it, Master. You know that.”

“Let that suffice. What she had done and what had happened to induce her to curse God is not to be mentioned. Continue.”

Andrew realized from this that they had to have *some* kind of permission before they were allowed to enter a person. But it did not really solve his problem, because apparently that permission was not all that difficult to obtain. She cursed God, and that was enough. God forbid that I should ever curse God! thought Andrew.

“—you tell her?” Jesus was saying.

“Only that she was evil, something that she knew very

well, most merciful Master, and whether she wanted to learn what evil really was, so that she could understand what had happened to her.”

Andrew quaked. They really entered by giving the person a plausible reason that they could solve a difficulty he had. Andrew was looking for a solution to whatever was wrong with his resentment of Simon, when all he consciously let himself believe he wanted was justice and fairness. He could imagine some demon telling him, “I can explain just why the way you are treated is unfair. Let me help you.”

But the problem was that Andrew realized that his *attitude* that it was unfair was the problem; he was not seeing things as they really were, for some reason. He did not need explaining why he was right; he needed someone to explain why he was wrong, and what to do about it.

But it would be so easy to let someone or something in to tell him what he wanted to hear! His legs shook, and he was glad that he was wearing a tunic and a cloak, so that no one could see.

At that moment, the demon in the woman said, “I cannot lie, Master. I admit that.”

“You cannot lie!” scoffed Jesus. “You! You cannot lie to me, certainly, because I know the truth beforehand. I say this, however, so that she will understand that you have been lying to her from the beginning, and so that she will no longer trust anything she thought she knew up to now.”

Andrew thought, God save me from listening to such lies, even though I know not what the truth really is!

—Come to think of it, was not this Magdala that they were nearing? Was this not the home of a famous prostitute,

who was corrupting all of the elite of Galilee and Judea? What was her name? Mary. Mary of Magdala. Was it really she? But who else could it be? She had obviously been trying to see if she could seduce Jesus. The demons in her must have received a shock!

Jesus now broke in on the protestations of the devil-spokesman, "Be silent. I would speak to her now. Allow her to speak."

The woman looked up from the dust of the roadway, with her hand clutching convulsively at a root that grew across a rut. She saw Jesus's face and shrieked in terror. She looked as if she had just peered into the pit of hell.

He reached down and touched her back, and she seemed to change. Her eyes went down to the ground before her face once again; and she fought to keep her gaze fixed there, but in spite of herself, she found herself being raised to her feet by his hand, and standing up. Then she looked at herself, seeming to realize how she must appear, with her eyes modestly cast down in front of everyone like a repentant sinner, and suddenly tilted her head back and stared defiantly straight into the eyes of Jesus. A feat of courage that Andrew could not have matched.

"Do you understand your situation?" he asked calmly, and she reacted at first as though he had stung her; but then immediately regained her insolent expression. She was still strikingly beautiful, in spite of the dust and the state of her clothes. In spite of himself, Andrew desired her, and as soon as he realized what was happening, he fought it with all his strength. No wonder she had so many clients!

Jesus looked at her, not paying attention to her obvious attitude, but simply waiting for an answer, which took a long

time before she nodded.

“Do you wish to be freed from them?” came the question.

Again she paused, and a shudder ran through her body. She looked as if in spite she was going to give a flippant answer; but she was looking into his face, and evidently realized that this would not be acceptable.

“I wish to die,” she answered, and added in a voice of scorn, “Master.” As he opened his mouth to speak, she drew in her breath in terror.

But he merely said, “That is not for me to grant you now. Do you wish to be free of the demons within you?”

Again a very long pause, and then her face changed from considering the question, and she glanced at Jesus with fear and scorn.

“They are lying to you once again,” he said. “If I free you, I will send you from me; and you may stay away if you wish. In fact, I will not permit you to return before sunset tomorrow, so that you will have time to consider your life and what you truly want for yourself.”

“You will not be doing me a favor.”

“Possibly not.”

“Then why do you torment me? You have the power. Why do you not simply do it?”

“Because it is your life, not mine.”

“And therefore, I must decide! Then accept my hate and do it! I care nothing for what may happen! Do it!”

“You have heard?” said Jesus, but not to the people around him, but to those inside her. “You are to leave her and remain apart from her until tomorrow after sunset, and then you may return only if she permits you. Go!”

She emitted a gurgling sound, akin to what is called the “death rattle,” after which she took in a gasping breath and screamed so that the hills rang, as she fell once more to the ground and writhed and writhed like a snake whose head had been cut off, shrieking and wailing with different voices, all in the ultimate throes of agony. Andrew was rooted to the spot, as were the others.

After an eternity of this, everything stopped. She lay exhausted on the road.

Evidently, the thought came to her that everyone was looking at her humiliation, because she glanced round and suddenly sprang to her feet, staring defiantly once again at Jesus. She tossed her head, and said, “You think you have done a good deed! You think you have saved me! You have destroyed me!”

“Perhaps so,” he answered. “That will depend on you. You have a night and a day of peace to consider it.”

“Consider what? Who am I? What have you left of me?”

“Whatever there was of you that they left behind. You will find that there is much. You will recognize yourself.”

“I doubt it.”

“If you refuse to do so, that is your choice, of course.”

“So I am to consider my evil ways, and then return and beg your forgiveness, (she spat out the word) now that you have left me this torn piece of rag that I must now call myself.”

“Understand this: If you wish to be forgiven, you will receive forgiveness—Do not speak; I am aware that you do not believe it possible. If you wish tomorrow evening to be forgiven, return to me.”

“And then I am to learn the conditions you impose.”

“The only condition is that you wish it. You must know one more thing. It will not be possible for you to kill yourself before tomorrow night.”

“So you would remove from me the one blessing in this curse you have cursed me with!”

“For a time, yes. You are rash, Mary. If I did not, you would kill yourself without taking thought. And you will find that it is not now necessary.”

Mary. So she *was* the notorious Mary of Magdala!

Then you are master, and I am slave.”

“Yes.”

“Suppose I refuse to take thought. Suppose I simply wait until tomorrow night.”

“I will not force you to do otherwise.”

“Do you actually believe that you can control my thoughts? Not even they could!”

“It is of no consequence.”

“No consequence! That you think you can control thoughts! That you can forgive sins! You claim that I was deceived by spirits within me, and you practiced magic on me to drive them out! My deception is nothing in comparison!”

“Drive her away, Master!” shouted Simon the Revolutionary. “She herself is ten times the demons you cast out of her!”

“I need no driving, kind sir,” she said in a voice of withering scorn. “If the Master will dismiss me, I will leave of my own accord. May I depart, Master?”

“You may go.”

“Thank you, gracious Master. Gracious, kind, generous Master! I leave you in the pleasant company of the rest of your slaves!”

Twenty-Two

THERE WAS NO CONVERSATION AFTER THIS encounter. “Legion” was child’s play in comparison. Andrew was stricken with the thought that a demon—a demon! Seven this time and a legion of them just before!—could enter a person, simply, it seemed, if the person was not unwilling to let it happen! He wanted nothing more to do with such beings, ever! And yet he was in the business, so to speak, of confronting them and driving them out of people.

He could not do it!

But of course, he could and he would. He would simply have to trust Jesus, who knew that he *wanted* to be a good servant of his, but did not really know how. He thought back with amused irony at how confident of himself he had been when he was but a fisherman with Simon; but now that he had begun catching men, he felt like a total blunderer!

And a blunderer who had some sort of spiritual disease, he was convinced, though he could not read the symptoms. He could not see why justice was not really justice, and that was

the issue, was it not?

Perhaps he had better discuss it with Jesus himself. But he quailed at getting himself into a disputation with him, as if he were a Judas trying to explain to him why he was wrong. Because justice *was* justice. How could it not be? And yet . . .

Andrew looked over at Thomas, and saw that his hands were actually shaking, and everyone else seemed as unnerved as he was. After a while, a young man, obviously a slave, came up and spoke quietly with Jesus, who nodded, spoke briefly, and then dismissed him.

“I have been invited to dine at the house of Simon the Pharisee tomorrow evening. I told the slave that I would take with me only the Rock, so as not to burden him. We will therefore stay here by Magdala for the next day or two. And since it is evening already, let us find ourselves a suitable place and eat our evening meal.”

They found a pleasant clearing in the woods, not far from a stream in which it was possible to bathe, and the women began unpacking the essentials for the meal, while a couple of the men built and started a fire.

They milled around for a time until all was ready, the air full of the smell of woods and of meat cooking, merely exchanging a word or two, because all were still recovering from the close encounter with the powers of hell. It was definitely not a game, nor anything to be tried without being told to do so from Jesus himself; and even then. . .

Eventually, they sat round the fire to eat, Thomas with Matthew and Andrew. “But can you imagine *being* that woman!” said Thomas. “With those things inside her!” He shuddered again.

“Did they not say that she knew they were there?” said Andrew. “How could she have borne it?”

“What could she do, once she had invited them in? —or rather, not refused their entry.” answered Thomas. *That* was terrifying. One need not explicitly ask them to come in, thought Andrew. “They obviously had complete control over her until the Master wrested it from them.”

“Which she was not too happy about,” said Andrew. “She acted as if being under his dominion would be the same thing.”

“Well of course she would,” put in Matthew. “She was still thinking as the demons thought, even after they had been driven out.” Thomas raised an eyebrow and looked at him. He sounded as if he were trying to defend her. Andrew thought, Am I *that* obvious? “I wonder if we will see her tomorrow evening,” he said, and immediately caught himself hoping.

“I suspect we will,” said Thomas. “The Master does not do things idly, and it would be a little incongruous for him to drive the devils away only for a day.”

“Well,” remarked Matthew, “he respects one’s freedom, and if she wants to be subject to them again, he would not prevent it.” Andrew saw with some amusement that Thomas’s hand went to cover his wineskin, evidently in fear that if he wanted to use it, Jesus would not prevent him.

“True,” he said, “but he must know what she will in fact decide, even if she does so freely.”

“How is *that* possible?” asked Andrew. “If her choice is free, then it cannot be known beforehand, can it?”

“I would not be too sure of that. I can know now what my choice yesterday was, and that it was free, and my

knowledge does not make it less free.”
But that was yesterday.

“What I mean is, *if* you can know the future—and he certainly seems to be able to do, given what he has been saying about being ‘surrendered into human hands’ and so on, then what you know is what in fact will happen, and that knowledge does not take away from *how* it happens, any more than my knowledge of the past does.”

“I do not see it,” said Andrew.

“What sense is there in breaking our heads over such questions?” asked Matthew. “*We* know not what will happen, and will have to wait and see.”

“You will never be a philosopher, Matthew,” said Thomas. “But you have a point. But what struck me most about all this was how pure and innocent she looked, and it turns out that she is the infamous Mary of Magdala!”

“One can see how she could seduce people,” said Matthew. “Everything about her makes one want to fold her in one’s arms and protect her.” There it is, thought Andrew, He is smitten with her.

“Fold *her*?” exclaimed Andrew, partly hoping to warn him—and himself. “As well fold a cobra!”

“I imagine,” replied Thomas, “that is what many discovered, once they had done a bit of folding.” Apparently Thomas had noticed Matthew also, and was seconding what Andrew said; but he paid no heed—no heed at all. He said, “Well, it will be fascinating to see what happens tomorrow,” and they departed to where they were going to sleep.

But events prevented Andrew from seeing Jesus by himself, and the night and the day passed without incident, except that Andrew kept reliving the past two encounters with

the powers of hell, and being more frightened by them the more he thought of them. He went more or less blindly with the others when they followed Jesus and the Rock to a house and waited outside as they entered. It was something about an invitation to dinner.

It was evening. The time when the woman would either come for forgiveness or be out of their lives. Andrew wondered if they would see her; she had doubtless considered whether she wanted to be forgiven, now that she had no demons; or whether the demons would surround her with cajolings so that they could enter once again. Jesus had left open that possibility. And if she *did* want to be forgiven, how would she know where Jesus was? And how would she get in to see him if she did? The sun was setting, so she would have to appear soon if she were to appear at all.

And there she was, running breathless down the hill. "See there! She comes!" someone cried.

She scrambled, gasping for breath, up to the first man she saw, not one of the Twelve, and clutched at his robe; he shrank away in disgust as he turned and saw her, but she cared nothing. "This prophet—" she panted, "what is his name? Has he arrived yet?"

The man flung her hand from off his garment and turned away, but someone else answered, "He is inside at supper." "Is she not?" said another. And another, "She is! That is the one who—" "Let me by!" she cried. "I must see him!" She struggled against a man who was trying to hold her back. His grip was strong, but her fear and her need were superhuman. She broke free.

"She has a demon still!" he exclaimed, holding his hand. There was shouting and a general running to and fro, some

trying to get at her to stop her, others to distance themselves as far as possible.

Andrew raised his voice above the tumult, "Let her by! If the Master wishes to see her, you will not be able to stop her! Let her by!"

There were protests, and a few still reached out at her, and Andrew was about to step up to her to bring her to the door, but, clutching a jar which looked like some kind of perfume or ointment, she pushed everyone aside as a boat pushes flotsam from its way in the water. She pounded on the door with the jar, and then stopped, evidently afraid she would break it and spill the perfume.

The door suddenly opened, and she disappeared inside.

There was a dead silence for a short time, and then murmurs arose, louder and louder. "What has the Prophet to do with such creatures?" "Do you not remember?" "Remember what?" "Yesterday, he said that if she came to him today, he would forgive her sins." "When? Why?" "He drove seven devils out of her yesterday; they said they were seven. It was horrible!"

Thomas said in an undertone to Matthew, "—It will be interesting if she also chooses to join us; it was one thing to accept you, Matthew, and me, but this will strain our tolerance to the limit!"

Simon the Revolutionary heard him, and said, "Join us? *That* one? Can you imagine the reputation we will have: 'Not only does he consort with tax-collectors and sinners, he has a prostitute in his midst! And not only a prostitute, but Mary of Magdala!'"

Thomas turned round to face him and said, "Well, you

had best prepare yourself. All the signs indicate that that is exactly what is going to happen.”

“Nonsense!”

But it did look that way. Jesus was evidently collecting the flotsam and jetsam of humanity to transform them into holy ones following him. Holy ones! Incredible! But then . . . Well, in that case, he was certainly showing that *anyone* could be a holy one. Here he had a drunk, and a tax-collector, of all people, and now a notorious prostitute and corrupter of the finest in Judea and Galilee. How *she* would be transformed into the demure creature she seemed to be would broadcast to the world that anyone, no matter what he had done, was welcome in the company of Jesus, if he was willing to change his attitude.

Andrew thought, “I am willing! I am simply not able!” And he all but heard Jesus answer, “Of course you are not. Why are you worried? *I* am able, and that is enough. Fear not.”

He would have to hear that from Jesus’s mouth to even begin to believe it.

The door remained closed for an inordinate length of time, and gradually the conversation died down to an occasional remark now and then, none of it favorable either to Mary or to Jesus, for admitting her. The consensus seemed to be that driving out devils was all well and good, and perhaps even forgiving sins (though there was less agreement on how just this was), but it was generally agreed that there were proprieties, after all, and a person *was* known by the company he kept. But of course, that also meant that *Mary* would from now on be known by the company *she* kept. God grant that this company would receive her!

And Andrew pictured her among them, reformed, and he burned with desire.

But of course, if he gave in to the desire, then she would relapse into her old self, and the last state, as Jesus had said in a story about casting out demons, would be worse than the first!

Eventually, the door slowly opened, and Mary emerged, looking bewildered and lost. Matthew looked at her with pity; and Andrew looked at Matthew—as a rival. She certainly *was* seductive, perhaps especially now, since she presumably had repented of her evil ways. Now she not only looked innocent, but she was doubtless free—whatever that meant, though Matthew would know—of all the evil she had committed.

As the door closed behind her someone said, “Behold! She has been driven from his sight! As I told you!” Another chimed in, “I knew that we should not have let her by!”

There was an ominous movement of the small group toward her, with cries to the effect, “Let us show her what one does to those who defile the Master’s presence!” when the door opened again, and a slave put out his head saying, “The Master wishes this woman to have a safe escort to wherever she chooses to go.” He looked at her in disgust for an instant, and disappeared inside.

“Safe escort!” “As if she were a princess!” “It cannot be!” “Look at her! We know who she is!” “She is the worst of her lot!” They came no closer, but neither did anyone step forward to help her through them. and they formed a wall in front of her. She glanced off to her right, thinking to get round them, and saw a small group of women, with faces, if anything, ten times more menacing.

She bridled at the taunts, which kept coming from all sides, and was about make an insolent reply, but thought better of it. She bit her tongue and then after a long pause said, "You are right. I am a disgrace to womanhood. No one knows how much of one, except one man. And he forgave me. So please, let me pass; I must—" And she stopped, at a loss as to what she was to do. She stood there, closed her eyes, and teetered slightly.

A man came up to her and clapped a hand on her shoulder. "You see, *madame*, it is not quite so simple." She opened her eyes and looked into his huge brown face sneering not a palm-breadth in front of her. The hand transferred itself to her chin and forced her to look at him, and she recoiled at the stench of his breath. "You think you can go to him as to a magician and be forgiven for what you have done, and all is erased. You can now go back to leading men into—" "Leave her alone!" cried John, coming up behind him and with surprising strength spinning him round. "The Master said 'Safe escort,' and safe escort she shall have! If he forgave her, who are you to persecute her?"

"Who am I?" he spat out. "I am one who knows right from wrong!"

"You call yourself his student—" "I call myself the student of no man who allows whores to go unpunished!" He swung his free hand and landed a resounding slap on John's cheek. The crowd erupted in noises on both sides, while John fell back a step in surprise and pain, holding his face, while the man said, "You call *yourself* his student, now, do you not? Very well, then turn me the other cheek!"

"I turn you my fist, you lobster! You pig's dropping!—" And suddenly, he checked himself, his face flaming, and stood

up to the brownbeard, presenting his cheek. He said in a quiet voice, but full of suppressed passion, "Very well. But if you touch her, it will be a different story."

"It will, will it?" said the man, slapping him once again, now with the back of his hand. "You thought I would not do it, did you not? Now we will see what—"
"That will be enough!" said Andrew, in almost a conversational tone, one which took for granted that it would be obeyed. He towered over the man. "You, sir, whoever you are, if you do not choose to follow a man who would forgive whores, then I suggest you leave this group; our Master would not be to your liking. John, you are too hot-headed."

"What was I to do? Stand there? No one else made a move!"

"We were here," said Andrew calmly, though inwardly he was quaking, not least as he was confronting John, whom he loved as a brother. Her attacker was backing away as inconspicuously as he could. "Some of us do not move as quickly as you, but we would have managed to see that no harm was done, without the necessity of making a fuss."

"And who put you over us, if I may ask?" said John, his face still red, both from the slaps and anger now at Andrew. Andrew was afraid this would happen, but he could not see any way to avoid it. John stood there with his head tilted back, talking as if to his chest, he was so close. "I did not hear the Master call you Andrew Rock."

He could not have stunned Andrew more if he had administered the two slaps he received from the brownbeard. His face turned as red as John's after he had been struck, and he started to make a fist, but simply closed and opened his hand in pain.

John stood there, quite as shocked as Andrew, and Andrew, seeing this, fought to control himself, and managed to say, with a calmness that surprised even him, "If you wish the opinion of Simon Rock, you have only to go in and ask him," he said. "Now let us all stop being silly. We give a fine example of what his students are if we continue thus."

Mary was standing there, evidently pondering what had happened, and Andrew said, "I think that there will be no more trouble; I am sure that no one will bother you now, madame." He could not completely keep the desire out of his voice, as well as the disdain at himself for having it, and his anguish at John's opinion of him. Fortunately, by some miracle, it was not obvious, and—he hoped—he sounded respectful. "You may go."

"Thank you," she answered, in a small, uncertain voice, looking around still like a kitten whose mother has been taken from her. She seemed to think she had to leave—she had not exactly been welcomed, to say the least—but did not think she dared to return to her house, which implied her former way of life. She started off tentatively, then stopped after taking three steps, looked about with a bewildered expression, and turned to walk in a different direction—anywhere, nowhere, but not there—when an anguished Matthew could bear it no longer, and said in a kindly voice, "May I assist you?"

She looked at him with terror, and he laughed. "Please excuse me," he said. "I find it rather amusing now to think that anyone is afraid of me. That is, any longer. I mean, afraid in the way you seem to be. I do not seem to be expressing myself well—Andrew, would you assure her she has nothing to fear from me?"

So Matthew has fallen into the pit, thought Andrew, who was still teetering on its edge. “He is harmless enough, madame; fear not.” he said, with an amused smile on his face. Mary seemed not to hear him, or not to understand. But she looked over again at Matthew with no sign of fear.

“Let us leave this mob,” he said. “You are overwrought.” He took her hand (Took her hand!) and as she looked up into his jet-black eyes, he thought how incredibly beautiful and vulnerable she was, and had to fight an almost overwhelming urge to put his arms about her. Andrew watched with amusement. And for an instant she looked as if she was responding to him, and then both suddenly looked away. Matthew’s face blazed, and he saw Mary look down with a blush of shame. (Of shame! Or perhaps this was the technique.)

They stood there, too embarrassed to move or speak, for what seemed hours, when finally Matthew managed to blurt out, “Forgive me.” She looked up at his hot cheeks in astonishment, evidently thinking that *she* was the one that needed to be forgiven, as if she had tried to seduce him.

“It seems I cannot express myself very . . . that is, I am aware that you have had a very trying . . . I myself have had my own sins forgiven, and . . . it is anything but a pleasant . . . but of course in your case. . . I ordinarily know how to speak to a person, but at the moment am . . . at any rate, I have realized that you have been through some . . .” He knew that she was looking at him and understanding not a word he was saying—which, under the circumstances, was all to the good—so he continued to fill in the space “very unsettling . . . experiences in these days,” he was saying, “and it . . . must be

very difficult to get your bearings. Please do not think I am trying to take advantage of your . . . confusion.”

She answered, once again casting her eyes to the ground. “Yes, it is . . . difficult” and immediately bit her lip, as if wondering if she was again acting like the seductress.

If it was playacting, it was superbly done, thought Andrew, half-wishing he was in Matthew’s place, and half-rejoicing that he was not. And the interesting thing was that Matthew did not seem to realize that he was head-over-heels in love with her already.

Should he tell him? No. He would not believe him, and Mary, who seemed not to regard him as a victim (unless she was deeply into her former wiles, which was unlikely given what she had been through), but rather as a kindly old man who had for some reason taken pity on her. She *did* seem to check herself every time she responded seductively—which, of course, made her five times more seductive.

Andrew knew that if he stepped in and she was a tenth of her former self, he could take over from Matthew in an eyeblink; but in the first place, she was probably *not* a tenth of her former self—at least, not deliberately—and secondly, if she *were*, he was lost, completely lost, and he knew it.

And desperately wanted it.

He made his way to the clearing where they were to eat. Matthew and Mary had wandered off, perhaps to some place she could go, though Andrew had his doubts about this. He was convinced that she was a new addition to the group, which excited him and worried him immensely. Well, he presumed with Jesus there, they were all safe.

Twenty-Three

BUT SLEEP AFTER THEIR DINNER, which Mary and Matthew finally attended, came late and fitful; and much of it was occupied, interestingly, not with Mary, but John. Andrew had been convinced that John admired him, and the tone in which he said, “I did not hear the Master call you Andrew Rock” was a sword that pierced him to the heart. He almost cried when he remembered it. It sounded almost as if John hated him. Well, if it came to that, he could reciprocate. But it was such a pity!

But then, when morning finally came, John actually sought him out. Andrew, who did not know what to make of this, looked at him with puzzlement not unmixed with scorn, but after some hesitation, John said, “Andrew, I wanted to tell you how—how well you handled the situation last night. I admire your self-command, the more especially since I completely lost mine.”

Andrew looked down at him, somewhat more fondly. Perhaps all was not lost. He replied, “Well, of course, I had not just been slapped on both cheeks by that—what did you call

him?—‘pig’s droppings.’” He actually laughed, and John also laughed in embarrassment.

John hurried on, anxious to say what he wanted to say. “But what I said to you was inexcusable, and I want to tell you that it was the very opposite of what I think—and many others also. I have heard several of the group say that they wish you had given the answer Simon did.” Andrew felt like crying again, for relief and joy.

He put his huge arm on John’s shoulder as before. John warmed at the touch, and Andrew felt it. “Well, when we are in such a situation, and cannot fight back—and I must say *you* showed restraint in not retaliating. I know not if I would have had what you called the ‘self command’ you showed in that. Small wonder that you lashed out at someone else.”

“I really hope you understand, or at least forgive me.”

“Think nothing of it, youngster. We all make mistakes.” And he pulled John toward him in a kind of sideways hug. John responded with something of a sigh of delight.

“Thank you.”

“Forget it. We are the partners we always were.”

“You are a great man, Andrew.”

“Nonsense! If you knew!” If he could see inside me! How I needed this! I was half ready to give everything up and—and what? He knew not.

At this point, Jesus, followed by Mary Magdalene, came up to the group. He had gone to see her, and rescued her from Chusa’s Joanna, who had befriended her the previous night, and then discovered who she was—which doubtless produced a considerable change of attitude toward her. Chusa’s Joanna was the female counterpart of Lazarus: rich (the wife of

Herod's steward) and a snob, who constantly protested how she was "just one of us." But what was worst about her is that her speech was one continuous sentence from morning to night.

She emerged before Jesus and Mary, with a face indicating that Jesus had performed the miracle of silencing her. Doubtless from now on she would elaborate on how broad-minded she was. Andrew could not stand her, and kept away from her as much as possible.

Jesus motioned to Mary, and she went toward them, somewhat irresolute; Matthew—of course—beckoned to her, and shyly and gratefully, (Shyly and gratefully! Mary of Magdala!) she took a seat beside him. Matthew had been swallowed whole; but the interesting thing was that she did not seem to realize it.

"I told you that there was something I wished to say," Jesus began. "There was a man who had two sons—" and he launched into a long story that had something to do with one of the sons going away and spending all his money and then repenting and coming back, and the father welcoming him, and the other son being angry at it, or some such thing. Andrew could see that it was about what their attitude should be to Mary, the "son" who had spent all his inheritance on prostitutes. They were not to act like the loyal son, who wanted to have nothing to do with him when he returned. The father said something like, "This brother of yours was lost and has been found. We had to celebrate."

According to Jesus, then, this sister of theirs had been lost (Lost! Dead!) and been found, and was as worthy of welcome as Matthew (Was the fact that Matthew was an outcast what

attracted him to her?) or Thomas or any of the others. We would have to become used to seeing a person as he now is, and not as the self he had repudiated.

Always supposing that she could give up the self she had repudiated.

But of course, Jesus was there. None of the students could succeed by himself; but with Jesus, anything was possible. Jesus was God, after all.

Was he not?

Jesus then beckoned Mary to him once again, and said, "We will be leaving here soon; it would be good if you would wash quickly. But remember, I would speak privately with you for a few moments afterwards, if you could arrange it."

As they headed down the road which would pass Magdala, continuing by the huge lake to Capernaum on the northeast shore, Jesus told them to walk on ahead, and he would come up with them later.

John's brother James took the opportunity of the group's being alone for a while, and said, "Aside from what just happened, however it turns out, things are becoming serious, He is coming closer and closer to a showdown with the Pharisees, and that is bound to mean that the Reign of God has all but started. Agreed?"

"Well, either it starts soon, or he and we are all destroyed," answered Thomas. "I have seen the looks on their faces."

"I agree," chimed in the other James. "It seems (hem) clear that they cannot allow him to continue much longer or (ha) the whole world will go after him and they will be left with (hem) nothing."

“And so?” said John, in a voice of skepticism. It seemed that he did not approve of the direction they were taking.

“Well,” answered his brother, “the Master seems too other-worldly to recognize that a Kingdom will have to have some kind of organization and structure. Someone will have to be in charge of its finances—and we have Judas for that—but someone will have to take care of order and seeing to it that the Master’s decrees are enforced, and of protecting the Kingdom from outside threats, such as Rome, for instance. And someone will have to take care of diplomatic relations with other nations, and so on.”

“And so?” repeated John in the same tone of voice.

“And so if the Master is above naming people for these positions—I mean no disparagement of him, far from it—then should not we, as more down-to-earth, undertake to decide who should be in charge of what in this new Kingdom?

John was about to reply, when the other James said, “I know not whether we should. Do you not think the Master might (hem) resent or take unkindly to our (ha) usurpation, as it were, of his prerogative?”

“Better that he should reprimand us,” broke in Simon the Revolutionary, “than that we suddenly find ourselves confronted with a Kingdom with no practical means of governance.”

“I am not so (hem) certain of that,” replied James.

Thomas said, “And he has already begun the process himself. Clearly the Rock is intended to be a kind of Prime Minister, if he has the ‘keys of the Kingdom,’ whatever that means. But lesser offices have never been mentioned.”

“The problem is how we decide on who is to receive the

offices. All of this will be subject to the Master's approval, of course. I have some ideas of my own, but you may not all agree."

"We probably *will* not," said Thomas. "Certainly not all of us."

"Exactly."

"No one has mentioned Andrew as yet, for instance—"
 "No one has actually mentioned anyone, if it comes to that," said James.

"True," continued Thomas, "and I doubt if anyone will have the temerity to put himself forward—though I suspect that each of us has his own ideas on that score."

"So what do we do? Do we draw lots?"

"Why not leave it up to the Master?" said Andrew.

"I would think that *you* of all people would be able to answer that question," said Thomas. "He picked your brother Simon as second-in-command, did he not?"

Andrew reddened. "And what if he did?"

"Come, come, Andrew, be honest. Even your brother would have to admit how much better you would be at being leader of us all."

"Actually, I agree," said the Rock. The others looked over at him in embarrassment, not realizing that he was there. "*I* have no idea why he picked me. I thought at first it was one of his jokes, but he seems to be serious."

"It does seem to me," said James, "that it argues to whether he is so spiritual that mundane practical considerations are best left to someone else. He might even admit this if one asked him."

"Oh yes?" said Thomas. "I can see someone going up to him and saying, 'Master, I admire your holiness and spirituality,

but do you not think that someone else would be better suited to choosing who is actually to govern this Kingdom of yours—or of God's, I mean.' I dare anyone to try!"

"What is it you were discussing as you walked along?" came Jesus' voice. He had come up behind them.

There was a dead silence.

There was a little boy on the edge of the crowd. Jesus beckoned him over, sat on a rock beside the road, stood him beside him, and put his arm around him. He looked at them. "Amen I tell you," he said, "if you do not turn back and become like children, you will not *enter* the Kingdom of God. Whoever lowers himself and becomes like this child is the one who has a higher position in the Kingdom of God, and" he looked at the little boy, "whoever accepts one child like this in my name accepts me. One who accepts you is accepting me, and one who accepts me is accepting the One who sent me. Now let us have no more of this. Thank you, my son," and he sent him back to his mother.

At this point, Jairus, the head of the local synagogue, came up to Jesus and said something to him. The people of Magdala had come out with Jairus, and the crowd around Jesus was now oppressive in its mass.

Jesus listened and then started out, with Jairus leading the way, when he suddenly stopped and looked around. Mary, who had come up close behind him, shrank back, expecting a rebuke at her presumption.

"Who touched me?" he asked.

The look on his face did not encourage anyone to volunteer, and those next to him hastily denied it. Simon Rock blurted, "Master, with a crowd around like this, you get

bumped into. What do you mean, who touched me?”

“No, no, someone *touched* me,” said Jesus. “I felt power go out of me.” And he kept looking around at the people, and finally an old woman came cringing forward and said, “It was I, good Master, I think.”

Jesus looked at her. “Forgive me, my good Master,” she went on. “I meant no harm; it is just that I had had this trouble for such a long time, and my daughter Judith told me—you see, the doctors had eaten up my whole savings and almost everything my daughter could earn—I have not been able to work for years and years, though I once was known as a seamstress inferior to none—”

Mary, now that she knew that Jesus was not rebuking her, looked over at the woman, and suddenly seemed to recognize her. That was interesting. Where could she have met such a person?

“—harm could it do, she told me,” the woman was continuing, “and she said I should go and ask you, and I said that we had no money to pay you, and so I felt I had no right to bother you; but it occurred to me that if I merely touched the tassel of your robe, that would be enough, and—you see, it is not that we would not pay you, it is just that we *have* no money, and I had no idea that it would cause you any distress, and . . .” She trailed off under Jesus’s gaze.

“Just what is this trouble you have had?” he asked.

“Bleeding, Master. Twelve years I have been bleeding, every day, not as wom—but always, you understand. Sometimes enough to fill a drinking-cup. You may ask my Judith; she has taken care of me these many years, she is such a wonderful daughter, and has worked also to keep us both

alive.” There was a young girl, about David’s age, hovering at the back of the group, presumably Judith.

“And you spent all your money on doctors.”

“Whenever we could scrape any together, Master. Every mite went to them; everything we have left from food and the barest necessities. But nothing helped. Nothing. I was at my wits’ end, especially since my daughter had lost her work, and—” Her voice trailed off once again.

“And so you believed that merely by touching my robe, you could be cured,” Jesus was saying. The woman started once again to protest that she would pay when she could, and Jesus held up a hand. “You were correct. It was your belief that cured you; you may go in peace.”

As the woman held her hand up over her heart in incredulous relief and joy, Jairus, who had been growing more and more impatient at the interruption of his quest by this insignificant woman, but who did not dare remonstrate, managed to put himself in Jesus’s line of sight once again, and Jesus turned anew to follow him, when someone came up to Jairus and whispered in his ear. His face fell, and he looked over at Judith’s mother with fury.

His head then dropped in despair. He stood there for a moment, unable to move, and finally began to turn away, when Jesus laid a hand on his shoulder and said, “Do not be afraid. You believe also, and all will be well with her. Rock, I wish only you and John and James to come with me; have the others remain here. There must not be a mob around the house; the girl is very sick.” The four of them then left with Jairus and his servant.

Andrew, who was looking at the woman, happened to

notice that Mary was now looking around for someone else. The daughter, perhaps? But how would she—~~know~~ that I would find you here!” said a young girl, around David’s age, behind Mary. So Mary *did* know both the mother and the daughter!

When the girl saw Mary’s expression almost of guilt caught red-handed, she blurted in confusion, “Oh, I am sorry, Miss! Forgive me!”

“Forgive you? For what?” said Mary in an annoyed tone, as one speaks to a recalcitrant servant.

“I know not, Miss. I am sorry.” She had resumed her hang-dog attitude.

“In the name of all that is holy, will you stop saying that you are sorry!”

She gave a quick little curtsey, and said, “Yes, Miss. I am sor—” and put her hand to her mouth with a little giggle. “I cannot help it!”

Mary resumed her gruff manner. “So your mother is cured,” she said.

“Is it not wonderful! I am so overjoyed! And it is all thanks to you!”

“To me?” The astonishment on her face was a sight to behold.

“Well, to him, of course. But you were the one—Mother! Here is she, as I said! I told you that she would be here and the first thing she would do would be to speak for you!” And, without thinking of the liberty she was taking, she tugged Mary by the arm to her mother, who was still surrounded by the multitude. At the sight of Mary, there were whispers, and the crowd immediately thinned.

The mother already looked twenty years younger than she

had when first she saw Jesus. She was in a decent robe, of a bluish white, and had her thinning hair combed into respectability around the narrow, sharp face, with its Judean nose pointing like an arrow before her.

“It is so good to see you here!” said the woman. “Judith was always telling me how good you were, and I believed her, but,” she added with a look, whether of apology or collusion one could not tell “you know the stories. Or perhaps you do not.”

Good God! thought Andrew. I will wager there *were* stories! So this Judith was Mary’s servant, and her mother allowed it, despite the “stories!” She was either depraved or as desperate as she had represented herself to Jesus.

“—been stories,” Mary was saying. “I told you so when I saw you, you will remember.”

“Oh, yes, I suppose you did. It seems so long ago now. Yesterday seems so long ago now. Well, I did hear the stories, even from my very kindly neighbors” this in a tone of bitter irony “who kept after me for years, for her good, of course, to stop sending her to you. I finally told them, ‘Even if she is as you say she is, who else can she work for? I do not notice you taking her in to help us out!’ Well, that kept them quiet; but you know how a mother is, she worries. And in spite of the fact that I trust Judith more than I trust myself, I worried, every now and then.” With reason, thought Andrew. Was Mary grooming her to take her place when she became too old? No. No, not that girl. She obviously either had no idea of what Mary was doing, or was blinding herself to it because it was the only way she could earn money for her mother.

Incredible! Here was the notorious sinner, who had

cultivated the air of being a naive innocent, and she had as her personal servant someone who *was* a naive innocent. Andrew surmised that she learned her wiles from studying this girl.

Mary simply said, “Judith always did exactly what I told her.”

“I am confident she did,” said the mother with pride.

“But when I left you last night,” said Judith, still bursting with joy, and you said ~~you had seen the prophet~~—”

“Well, no, but you did not say you had not, and you would have if you had not. And when I heard that they were saying that he had driven seven devils out of a woman on the road the night before, and when I saw how changed you ~~were~~—”

“Oh, Miss, if you could have seen yourself! You seemed terribly afraid of something, but there was—I know not how to say it—hope or something in your face. You looked as if you were going to live!”

“As if seven devils had gone out of me.”

Andrew could not help it. He let out a “Haw! Haw!” when he saw the look on Judith’s face. Fortunately, no one heard him.

Judith held her hand to her mouth and drew in her breath as the implication of what she had said dawned on her.

“You know what tongues these people have,” broke in the mother. “Judith had told me that you were not well, and that this Jesus of Nazareth had cured you. Imagine! From Nazareth!”

Judith chimed in, “And when I went up to the house this morning and you were not there, I knew you would be with him, especially after—” and she broke off in horror at the new

faux pas she was about to make. The mother continued, possibly trying to cover the mistake, “And she told me how you had been cured, and how kind a man he was—Nazareth! Imagine!—and—well, she persuaded me that if he could cure you, then I would be a fool not to try him myself—and so I did. And for the first time in years I can walk without pain!”

“And it was all your doing!” said Judith. “I would never have been able to get her out of the house if it had not been for you!”

Mary looked at her. The girl actually did not realize that it was her own blind faith that had persuaded both Mary and her mother to meet with Jesus in the first place.

Another thought seemed to occur to Mary. “Oh, Judith,” she said, “I am glad I saw you. I wish you to do something for me.” She looked at the mother. “Would you excuse us for a moment?”

Andrew decided that that was enough. He wandered off by himself to think. He had a problem of his own that bothered him greatly.

Jesus had told a story that Andrew could not make head or tail of, and it troubled him greatly. It was about a man who hired workers in the morning, and paid them a normal day’s wage: a denarius. Then later in the morning, he hired others, and then around noon still others, and also in the middle of the afternoon, and even a few an hour before sunset. And then when they were paid, each one in each group received a denarius.

How could this be just? And when the ones who had worked the whole day complained, the owner told them that that was what they had agreed on, and why should they be

envious because he was generous? But Andrew thought that they had every *right* to be “envious.” It was not a question of envy, but of simple justice! Those who work more should be paid more! Or if you will, those who work less than the just wage should be paid less! How could it be anything but unjust to pay those who worked twelve hours the same as those who worked only an hour? It made no sense at all!

Andrew shook the story in his mind as a puppy shakes a sandal, but nothing fell out of it; and eventually he simply gave up. Presumably, Jesus knew what he was saying, and there was a solution there, but it was not a solution Andrew could fathom.

But it occurred to him that the solution to *this* problem was the solution to *his* problem. He would have to ask Jesus about it.

But Jesus was off—no he was returning, and the whole group was buzzing that he had brought Jairus’s daughter back to life!

Twenty-four

Not long after this, the group was walking along, and Andrew was conversing with his brother, as was his custom. Out of the corner of his eye, he happened to see Judas and Thomas, who evidently asked Judas for a drink. Judas had two canteens, and handed one to Thomas, who took a large mouthful, and paused with an “Oh-my-God-what-am-I-to-do-now” look on his face, and finally, with a great effort of will spat out—a red liquid—onto the ground. He turned to Judas in fury.

“What are you trying to do?” he shrieked. “Kill me?”

“What?” said Judas. “Oh, Thomas, I am sorry! I thought it was the canteen of water! Here! Drink this!” and he handed him the other one. Thomas took a mouthful—of water, this time—and tried to rinse away the taste. He spat it out and then took a long, long drink.

“What?” asked Simon, noticing that Andrew had stopped in the middle of a sentence.

“I will wager that that was deliberate!” said Andrew, with suppressed fury.

“What was deliberate?”

“Oh, Thomas asked Judas for a drink, and instead of water, he gave him wine.”

“No!”

“Indeed. I saw him spit it out, and then Judas apologized and handed him his canteen of water—*as if* he had mistakenly given him the wine, thinking it was the water.”

“You think it was *not* mistaken?”

“I am convinced of it! Judas is no absent-minded fool!”

“But why would he do such a thing? He could start Thomas off to being a drunk all over again! You know how drunks are!”

“Everyone does—including Judas. That was why it had to be deliberate.”

“Nonsense! It was an oversight, that is all.”

“Simon, anyone who has two canteens and is asked for a drink *by a drunk* would be *very certain* to be careful that he gave him water and not wine. How could he not be?”

“No, no, you are making far too much of it.”

“Well, have it your way.” He was not going to get into a dispute with Simon over this. But it was just too neat. A way to play a little joke on Thomas, and test him to see if he could spit out a drink he was given. And if he took it, either to taunt him or to tell him, “You see, there is no harm in a little drink of wine now and then.” Which would destroy him—and he had to know this.

But perhaps Simon was right; it seemed too malicious to be true. On the other hand, Judas was chafing under the fact

that everyone believed that Jesus *was* the Son of God and divine, somehow, not simply a vehicle for God to work through. His disdain for their ignorance and non-acceptance of his brilliant theory would tend to make him scornful of all of them—which could very easily translate itself into playing little tricks on them such as he had just witnessed.

Still, perhaps Simon was right and he was reading too much into what *could* have been merely an oversight. Perhaps Andrew's scorn for *him* at "explaining" Jesus's miracles and claims to be God's Son as madness and delusion was coloring Andrew's view of him.

But if he was right . . .

Something else interesting happened the next day, including Judas obliquely, but mainly about John. Andrew happened to notice him looking at something off in the distance as if studying it, and when he turned to see what it was, it was Mary. There was nothing remarkable in that, in itself; Andrew enjoyed looking at her—a little more than he wished, given who she might still be. But there was a detachment about John's gaze, somehow.

She did not see him looking at her for quite some time, and when she noticed him, she looked back with a kind of "only you can save me" expression on her face—for just an instant, and then reddened and looked at the ground. And at this point, Judas passed between the two of them and broke the spell.

Was Mary attracted by Judas? Why would she not be? He was extremely handsome. But of course, the question was whether she was attracted by him as Andrew was attracted by her, and fought it off. John, however, almost acted if Judas

were the one he was attracted to. But that was silly. John was no prancing effeminate.

But just then Ezra passed, and said something as if to the air. A confirmation of something he had said to John? It even sounded (Andrew could hear no words) almost like a warning. John shook his head and walked back to the encampment.

It seemed that much was going on in this little group, now that Mary had appeared among them. God grant that no damage would be done.

A different episode occurred the very next day. Andrew had decided to keep an eye on John, and noticed that he and his brother James were talking to his mother, protesting something, and clearly embarrassed almost to tears.

She all but dragged them before Jesus, and made a request of him, while the two of them studied the ground at their feet. Jesus wore an amused smile. He asked them something, and they answered, as if bravely, "We can!"

Jesus then looked at them fondly, and said, "Yes, you will drink from my cup, but second and third place in my Kingdom is not for me to give; it is for those my Father has prepared it for."

He then patted both of them on the shoulder with an "I understand" gesture, and bowed to the mother, who stomped back to her house in some dudgeon.

Andrew saw that the two were not responsible for what their mother did, but someone else apparently overheard some of the conversation, and there was angry discussion about it. Jesus once again intervened, and said, "You have heard that Gentile authorities act like masters of slaves, and the nobles let the ordinary people feel their power. That is not how it is to be

with you. If anyone wants to be of the upper class, he is to become your servant, and the one who wants the top rank is to be your slave. In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be waited on; he came to serve—” and he paused and looked out at the horizon—“and to give up his life as a ransom for many, many others.”

Again. He was to “give up his life.” Andrew hoped that his doing that would accomplish the salvation of the world, somehow, if not its transformation into what it should have been.

As Andrew was walking a few days later, he met Nathanael, and at the same moment saw Thomas, Mary, and—of course—Matthew engaged in earnest conversation. “Shall we?” he asked, and Nathanael nodded. They went over and Nathanael said, “May we join you?” and sat down with Andrew.

“Matthew,” said Thomas, “says that the Master wants us to be holy, but does not care about our sins.”

“Actually, that is one of the strangest things about him, I think,” said Mary, too interested in the topic to wait for Nathanael to reply. “Who would have put up with me but he? Most people I know can forgive another person, but only if they can find something to excuse what he did—in fact, we can only forgive ourselves if we can excuse our acts. In my case, I could find nothing whatever to excuse myself, once—once the mask had fallen from the sham I was living. But he had said that if I wished, I would be forgiven. Simply if I wished. Of course, before that night, I had not thought that anything I did required forgiveness, I even thought of it as virtue, because—well, for a stupid reason. But then, when I could see

what I had done—and he seemed to know what I had done far better even than I—I saw that nothing could excuse it. But he forgave it without looking for an excuse. It was as if he said, ‘Well, you did it, and you now wish you had not done it, and that is enough.’”

“—Provided, of course, that you do not wish to continue doing it,” said Matthew.

“Of course,” she said. “I wonder,” she mused, “what would happen if one did something again after having been forgiven.” Was she wondering, thought Andrew, if she might succumb to Judas? She looked pensive but rather frightened.

“As to that,” said Thomas, “you must not think that it has not happened. Some of us have been with the Master almost a year now. It is just what you would expect. Do you remember, Matthew, when John provoked the Rock almost to a fight twice in the same day, and the Rock forgave him both times, and then went up to the Master, feeling so very virtuous, and asked him, ‘How many times should I forgive a person who has wronged me? As many as seven times?’ obviously thinking he would hear the reply, ‘Oh, once is quite sufficient’—and you should have seen his face when the Master answered, ‘Oh, no, not seven times; I tell you seventy times seven! (with his characteristic nodding chop of his head)’” He laughed huge guffaws, in which Andrew, who had so far kept silent, joined. Even Nathanael chuckled.

“I wonder why that is,” said Mary, pensively.

“I think I can answer that,” said Nathanael, speaking for the first time. “I think he does not envy the sinner.”

“He does not envy him?” said Thomas. “Come now, make at least a modicum of sense!”

“No, I am serious. Have you noticed how good people react to a sinner? They hate him and want to be sure that he is punished. Now why is that? Why should they care if someone else is doing what he should not? *I* think it is because they themselves would like to be doing it and getting away with it, as they see him apparently doing. But they are afraid that if they do what is forbidden, they will be punished, and so they want to make sure that he suffers for it.”

“Say that again,” said Matthew. “There may be something in it.”

“It is total nonsense!” said Thomas, nodding twice. There was something going on between him and Nathanael.

“I think not,” said Matthew. “I assume you are saying that people do not sin, not because they see it as bad in itself—or bad *for them* in itself, and so they would actually *like* to commit the sin if there were no punishment attached to it.”

“Exactly,” said Nathanael.

“And so they envy the sinner. . . . Hm.”

“—and *therefore* want him punished,” finished Thomas. “I must admit there might be sense in it at that. And you are claiming that the Master does not look on things in this way?” Was he calling a truce now with Nathanael?

“I would think that Mary and Matthew, of all people, would understand this,” said Nathanael. “From what I gather, you two devoted your whole lives to sin—and the kind that people envy most, in fact.” Andrew thought that he had a point. Making yourself rich by taking advantage of others was a sin people admired as cleverness—and of course Mary’s actually making money out of people who were desperate to have sex with her was something that many women—and men, for

that matter—would envy.

“—have any man she pleased, and discard him as soon as she had used him.” he was saying. “And you, Matthew, how much did you overcollect on the taxes Rome asked for? Twice as much?”

“Oh, no!” said Matthew. “It was more like five times.”

“And you kept the difference, of course.” He turned to Mary. “And you should have seen his mansion! We went there to eat after he joined us. It is sold now, of course, and here he is, as poor as the rest of us. Are you sorry you are not rich?”

Matthew smiled. “There is something in me that still is, of course, but I see what you mean. Being rich . . . has its advantages, I suppose I could say, in some ways. But in very few ways, when it comes to that. But I certainly would do anything rather than go back to the life of scheming how to cheat others without being cheated myself, worrying about how to prevent all those who hated me from killing me—and even worse, from stealing back what I had in effect stolen from them—and all the rest of it. I had not a moment’s peace or rest. Often and often, I wished that they *would* come and kill me and put an end to all of it. And what was all of it, in fact? A soft bed, upon which I could find no sleep, and luxurious food, which my stomach would not digest. You are right.”

“Is it not the same with you, Mary?” he said.

“Oh, yes. There may be women, to be sure, who are tired of their husbands and who would have looked at me and envied me—though I am sure they would never admit it—for having a different man every night. What they do not realize is that not being able to have the same man night after night makes the whole thing a mockery and a horror. And all the

perfumes and the carved wood and the rich surroundings are merely so much bait. Nothing could ever be enjoyed for what it was, least of all the act that everyone calls 'pleasure.' No, you are perfectly right; he rescued me from agony; my sin, far from being enviable, was a punishment far beyond any conceivable suffering which could be added to it."

"And you are saying," said Thomas, "that it is thus in every case. That if one really understands the sin, the sinner is to be pitied, not condemned."

"I would say that the sinner *is* condemned. And all the worse if he continues to think of his sin as something desirable."

"True," said Matthew. "I know some tax-collectors who think I am a fool. But what can one do? They refuse to listen, and I see the torment they daily undergo, but they in their delusion call it joy."

"That may be," said Thomas. "I do not deny that he probably sees sin as misery from which he can help us escape. How else can one explain his actions?"

"I am inclined to think, though," said Matthew, "that there is even more to it than this. I think he sees a misery even greater than the one we see, even when we are the sinners ourselves. Perhaps he sees a future for the sinner which *we* know not; the Pharisees say that life does not cease with death, and the life afterward might be the garbage-dump of Gehenna he speaks of about where the worm does not die and the fire is never extinguished."

Twenty-five

But there is something else about what he says that concerns me more than this,” broke in Andrew. The others looked at him.

“What is that?” asked Mary.

“Some of the things he tells us we should do make no sense. True, we should forgive our enemies, if we wish to be forgiven ourselves. It also makes sense to love one’s neighbor as oneself. Fine. But why give your tunic to a person who steals your cloak? If your cloak is gone, you need it more than he. And he stole it, after all. Why reward him? Why go two stadia with a person who has forced you against your will to go one? I can see *forgiving* my enemies, but why do them favors?”

“Does he say that?” asked Mary of Matthew.

“Oh, yes,” he answered. “He said it in so many words, in fact, even before he started telling stories.”

“No wonder, then, that he put things into stories. It does not sound fair.”

“That is the point,” said Andrew. “If I am no better than anyone else, I do not see why I should consider that I am worse. Remember that story he told the other day, Matthew, about the people the landowner hired to work in the vineyard? I do not see that at all.”

“What story was that?” asked Mary.

“It was about a man going to hire harvest workers by the day,” said Matthew. “He went out in the morning into the marketplace where the day-workers were waiting to be hired, and hired all the people there for a denarius apiece. And—”
Wait. What was wrong with that? That is a fair wage.”

“That is not the problem!” said Andrew, growing heated. “He went out in the middle of the morning, and at noon, and in the middle of the afternoon—and even an hour before day’s end—and hired more workers he found and told them he would pay them. And then when he *did* pay them, he gave each of them a denarius!”

“Even the people who worked only one hour?”

“He even paid them first! So that the others could see it! Now you *can* say, as Philip did, that they were all treated equally, because they all got the same wage, but that is not *my* idea of equality! All I can say is that if I were one of the ones who had slaved the whole day long and received no more than someone who spent only an hour at it, I would resent it, and rightly so! You cannot convince me that I had no right to resent it!”

“Well, now,” said Matthew, “he *did* ask those people what their problem was, because they *had*, after all, agreed to work for a day for a normal day’s wage.”

“Yes,” said Thomas, “but Andrew has a point. What

difference does that make? It is still the case that one person worked twelve hours for the same wages that another worked only one hour for,”

“Yes, but supposing he had hired no one else. Would they have complained about their wages when he paid them?”

“Of course not,” said Andrew, “but—”

“Well, then. Well, then. He *did* hire others! And he paid them the same!”

“But how are the ones he hired first *harmed* because he gave them a fair wage?”

“Because they were not treated fairly! They did more work and yet received no more for it!”

“But all that says, Andrew, is that he treated others with special generosity. It does not say that he treated anyone *badly*. They received a just day’s pay for a day’s work.”

“You honestly do not see the problem?”

“I see it,” said Thomas. “And I am inclined to agree. There must be a different meaning hidden here somehow. Perhaps he is saying that we all will receive the same reward for our labors after we die, but it will be so much greater than anything we could have desired that it will make no difference.”

“I do not see it. I do not see how it could make no difference.”

“In my case,” said Matthew, “I can see that *you* see a problem, and I see what it is. And perhaps Thomas’s solution is correct. But it seems to *me* that the point is that there is no injustice *unless* one compares oneself with others—and that is evidently what the story says. Do you have a problem, Thomas, with the fact that you are not as strong as Andrew?”

“What has that to do with it?” said Thomas.

“Thomas, it has everything to do with it. The Master in heaven—the Father, to use his terms—has not made us equal; but if we have what we need, how are we harmed if others are more gifted?”

“But,” said Andrew, “this is not gifts; he was speaking of what one earns from working! I care not if Nathanael here, or even Judas, is more intelligent than I; I care nothing that Zacchaeus, or Lazarus of Bethany, or—or you when you had it—have more money than I. What use have I for money? It is the principle of the thing!”

“Well, if you care nothing that others have more than you, why do you resent it if they receive more?”

“I tell you, it makes no difference to me what they have! What I resent is the fact that people are not being treated equally.”

“And what I am asking is why, if in practice it means that they get something that you apparently do not want anyway?”

“Because they are no better than I!”

“Ah, I think we are coming to the point, Andrew. Who says that having things makes one person better than another?”

Andrew looked at him with disgust. “Of course, how could anyone who would stoop to tax-collecting be expected to understand what I am saying?”

Matthew’s face flushed. “Oh, I understand very well, my young friend. Very well. In fact, somewhat better than you, if I may venture an opinion. But what you say simply proves my point—and, I suspect very strongly, the point the Master was trying to make. I had all the ‘wages’ any man could ask for, and with precious little effort; and you obviously think it did not

make me any better than you. It is quite clear, in fact, that you consider yourself better than I. And you may well be; it makes not the slightest difference to me. But your real problem does not lie in the fact that you consider everyone to be equal; it is that you really consider yourself better than others. You will condescend to be treated equally; but it is intolerable if you think someone else is preferred to yourself.”

Without a word, Andrew rose and strode away from them.

He walked around for a while through the woods by himself, fuming at first, and then gradually calming down. He was not someone who felt superior to others. Of course, he was a better fisherman than Simon—that was a simple fact—but not than his father or Zebedee. And he did not consider himself better than Matthew—

Did he?

In a way, now that one thought on it, Matthew was an admirable person, to turn his life around thus. As was Thomas, he supposed—and then realized that he had been secretly despising him because he *was* a drunk, not admiring him because he drank no more.

And what difference did it make anyway? Who was to say whether he was better than Thomas, since he did not have the—demons—to fight that Thomas had. Or Mary, when it came to real demons.

“And now we are coming to the heart of the difficulty,” said Jesus, who had been walking beside him without his noticing.

“Master!” he said, full of chagrin.

“You have come far, Andrew. Very far. I am proud of you.”

“If you could have heard what I was thinking just now, you would be anything but proud.”

“As it happens, I could, and that is precisely why I am proud. It is the solution—or part of it—to your difficulty with my story.”

“It is?”

“If you can continue getting over your resentment over what Matthew said to you, you *might* even be able to discover it for yourself. But I am here to help, if you wish.”

Andrew looked at the ground. “What is the solution? But first, what is the difficulty? I cannot see it.”

“Well, you consider it unjust that all should be paid the same amount, even if they worked vastly different hours.”

“It seems to me that what they received should depend on how they worked. What is wrong with that?”

“You *do* admit what Matthew said, that if only the first group worked, their being paid a normal day’s wage for their labor would be just.”

“Well, yes, but . . .”

“Let us stay there for a moment. Then Matthew pointed out that if they did not compare themselves with the other workers, the problem they had would vanish.”

“Well of course, but the other workers were there.”

“But let us just consider this first group. Some in it really enjoyed working in the vineyard, while for others it was an unpleasant task. Some were strong, and could do the work easily, and others were weaker.”

“What difference does that make?”

“Do you consider it unjust that those who found the work toilsome were paid the same as those who enjoyed what

they were doing? The first group was working much harder than the ones who were almost having fun.”

“Well, that may be true, but they were doing the same task.”

“So justice comes only in looking at what the task is and the number of hours one spends at it. But then what of tasks that are in themselves much harder than harvesting grapes? Fishing, for instance, or building roads for the Romans. Are all tasks equal, so that working at any task deserves the same pay as working at any other one?”

“When you put it that way, I would agree that some tasks should receive more pay than others.”

“But then even if the task is the same, if the effort one has to expend in it is greater—let us say even far greater—than the effort one’s neighbor expends, it would follow from what you just said that one should be paid more. By this logic, one who rows the boat should be paid more than one who casts the net.” He smiled.

Andrew was caught in a dilemma. He saw that rowing was much more effort than casting the net, but casting the net was considered to be more valuable.

“I do not understand,” he said.

“What I was trying to show you,” answered Jesus, is that there is no objective way anyone can say how valuable any task really is. It depends not only on how much the potential worker regards it as giving up his energy and time, but on how much the person who hires him wants the work done—how much it benefits *him* to have it done, if you will. And one vintner, who already is rich, may simply find pleasure in having his vines harvested, while another might need the harvest in

order to stay alive.”

“I can see that, I suppose.”

“And so a compromise is reached between the one who hires and the one who is hired. And once that compromise is reached, supposing no one is being harmed by it, the result is just.”

“But this means that it can be just for people to be treated unequally.”

“Precisely because there is no real meaning to ‘being treated equally.’ If the same task receives the same pay, then those who are weak or less competent—and must therefore work harder to accomplish the same result—are underpaid if the compensation is ‘equal.’”

“I suppose I must admit that.”

“And so what the point of the story was was that the *feeling* of being treated unjustly came from comparing oneself and what one was doing with others. Supposing the ideal situation, that each person was paid based on the effort that he expended and how many people—his wife and children—he had to feed with the fruits of his labor, we would find different salaries for each person, and sometimes the difference would be very great. It cannot be *just*, for instance, to give a person who must support twelve people the same amount as one would give a person who had no one else but himself to feed and who enjoyed doing the work in any case.”

“What you say does, I suppose, make sense.”

“And so there is no point to be comparing yourself with others. You are what you are, and who you are. You compare who you are with how you are treated, and if you find no harm done to yourself, how are you treated unjustly?”

“In other words, the people who worked all day should not resent those who worked only an hour for the same pay.”

“Who are they to say that those who only worked one hour did less work? It *seems* so, superficially, but one cannot know, unless he is my Father.”

“But it seems so obvious.”

“And what I was saying—and you were agreeing to—is that the obvious way of looking at it is not really accurate. And so we should not resent it if someone else seems to be preferred to us. The Father is looking at each of us, and arranging things so that what happens to us is for the best. Why should we care if he arranges things differently for someone else? You yourself admitted that it mattered nothing to you if you were less brilliant than someone else, or less rich. It is the same thing.”

“I *think* I can see what you are saying, but I also think that I will have to ponder it.”

“The point is that you should put yourself in the Father’s hands—where you really are—and let him control your life. That is part of the story. The other part, not to consider that you matter to yourself, is perhaps something we should defer for now.”

“What does that mean? Not to matter to myself?”

“As I say, you have enough to ponder for now. But to hint at what I mean, just consider my own case. If I mattered to myself, would I have come to live among you and serve you, as I have been doing? Would I die for you? Why? There is no answer, if I matter to myself.”

“Now I am completely bewildered.”

“Think on it. Who is to say, as you concluded just before we met, that you are better than Thomas, or worse than

Thomas? And what difference does it make, even if that question could be answered?"

And he left, with Andrew completely befuddled.

Twenty-Six

Shortly afterward, in passing a place where Judas and, interestingly, Matthew and—of course—Mary were sitting in earnest, if not shocked, conversation. He decided to listen, to see how Judas’s views had developed, if at all. Judas was saying—to Matthew; he acted as if Mary were not there—“It is unthinkable. God is not that sort of thing. Those gods do not exist and cannot exist. Our God is the only God there is, and he is a spirit, not a male in heat.”

“Of course. But then, what are you driving at?”

“Simply that, since he believes that he is God—God the Son, if you will, since he does not believe he is some kind of hero like Hercules; he knows too much about God for that—he is looking for the right moment to inform people of it, and some day, he will find it, and the people . . . will kill him. He foresees it himself.”

“But this is terrible! Dreadful!” said Matthew.

“It is tragic! He is without question the greatest man, and the holiest man, who ever lived. No one has ever been in closer contact with God; but the very source of his greatness is destroying him, little by little, every day. I know not what to do about it; as I said, I have not uttered a syllable of my fears until today. If I were to so much as suggest it to anyone but you, I would probably be killed myself!”

You do not want to talk about it! thought Andrew. You have already mentioned it to several people “in confidence”! You are trying to undermine our faith—and being quite convincing about it, I must say.

“I cannot believe it.”

“I fear that you will not have to, and quite soon. Now that I have pointed it out to you, you will see it happen yourself. It is like one of those Greek dramas. His statements about himself are becoming wilder and wilder, as he thinks we are more and more prepared by his wonderful deeds to accept them; and eventually, he will say something no one can accept—something so outrageous that no sane person can even listen to it—and he will be denounced to the Council. I know; I am a priest myself, remember, and I know that they are already looking for something that will remove him from bothering them. His lack of meticulousness about the Sabbath does not endear himself to them, especially when he makes them look foolish for objecting to it.”

“So you think that he will finally say something openly blasphemous.”

“I do, because he will not think it blasphemy, because he will sincerely believe it to be true. And once he says it, they will bring him to trial, and he will be too honest to deny the

charge, precisely because he believes it to be true—and believes it sincerely, since he is mad. And he will die.”

“You mean he will literally be crucified?”

“I fear so. Unless—unless the Power that courses through him gives him some spectacular means of escape at the crucial moment. But in a way, that might be worse, because then he will have won the conflict with the authorities, and we will be ruled from then on by a man who is convinced that he is God. But as I say, the Power, I think, enables him to save others; but I do not think it will be effective if he turns it upon himself. You see, what I consider inevitable is that the Council will find some way to twist what he says into sedition against Rome—and this will be simple if he lets Simon the Revolutionary have his way to the least extent—and once Rome comes on the stage, then it will be out of our hands, and all the force of the whole far-flung empire will be against him. He sees this too; because after all, he is saying that he will be crucified, and we do not crucify people. Yes, you will see him hanging on a cross.”

“No!”

“He has said so in so many words.”

“But he keeps adding that he will come back to life on the third day afterward, like Jonah.”

“Ah, well, of course, he *would* come back if he were really God, to prove that this is what he is. But . . .”

“No! No! No! It cannot be! You are mistaken!”

“I am sorry Matthew. You have no idea how sorry. Perhaps I should not have told you.”

Matthew stared at him openmouthed for what seemed forever. Andrew thought, Oh, yes, you are sorry! Oh, no, you

should not have told him! And with Mary listening in, dumbstruck!

Matthew, and of course, Mary were silent for a long time. Finally, Matthew said, in a calmer voice, “No, you are wrong, Judas. You must be. The Master would never allow him to perform miracles, if—”
 “You must remember that the Master is more of a Power than a person—
 Now that I cannot believe! That *is* blasphemy!”

“Have it your way,” said Judas. “But you have quite a few of the Judean priesthood against you. I admit that there are many who would agree with you. The trouble is that facts are facts, and whether you believe that I am right or wrong makes very little difference to what the facts are.”

“But that also goes for you, Judas. You are extremely intelligent, and you seem to have reason on your side, but what will happen will happen. Your thinking that you are right will not make you right, if you are wrong.”

“If I am. Believe me, Matthew, I would be overjoyed to be proved wrong. I love the Master, and it crushes me that his own mind is betraying him into destroying himself—and so needlessly! But we have not long to wait, I think. If I am correct, very soon he will be making some claim about himself that only a madman can accept. And he will ask us to accept it with no compromise. I am no prophet, but I see everything converging on this.”

Andrew thought, Overjoyed to be proved wrong! He is waiting until Jesus makes it clear who he really is, and asks people to accept him as divine, and one and the same as the Father. And Judas is preparing those he thinks he can influence to accept Jesus’s statements as insanity, when they are the simple truth! He is a menace!

He went to sleep that night, wondering what to do. Jesus had to be told what was happening—but of course, Jesus knew what was happening, if he was God; and if not, then perhaps Judas was right. But no, that could not be. Sleep came only after much and much of this futile wrangling with himself.

The next day, Jesus and the other eleven emissaries had gone into a lonely spot, after crossing the “sea” of Galilee in a boat, because Jesus had been so—one might say “pestered”—by the crowds that he decided that they should have a little time by themselves; they would return on the morrow. But it turned out that a positively enormous throng of people had divined where they were going, and had walked around the lake from Capernaum and all the surrounding area and caught sight of them; and Jesus, unwilling to simply send them away, had gone up a hill (it was not very far from the mountain where he had delivered his initial sermon), and he spoke to them at great length, sitting there, with the people ranged below him down toward the lake.

Finally, he said to the Twelve, who were gathered round him, “It is late, and the place is deserted.” He turned to Philip, who happened to be beside him. “Where will we buy enough bread to feed all these people?” He had a twinkle in his eye as he said this.

“Half a year’s salary,” Philip answered, “would not buy enough bread so that everyone could have even a little!” He gazed out at the crowd in dismay. Jesus wore a little smile. He looked around as if for suggestions.

Andrew said, “There is a boy here with five barley loaves and a couple of fish. But” he added as he cast a glance out at the crowd, “what good would that do with all of them?” He

waved his arm indicating the multitude. But he had an inkling of what was about to happen.

“Have the people lie down to eat,” said Jesus. The place was quite grassy, and so they milled about and reclined on it, spreading themselves on the field halfway down the hill.

Jesus then took the loaves of bread from the boy, raised his eyes to the sky and thanked his Father for supplying them with food. And then he tore the loaves apart and handed the pieces to the Emissaries to distribute; and did the same with the two cooked fishes. And each of the Emissaries managed to get a piece either of bread or fish or both. Andrew received a piece of bread—a rather large one—from John, and was about to return it, when he noticed that John still had a large piece; he must have been given almost a whole loaf. James the owl, with a twinkle in his usually solemn eye, gave him some fish also, and still had some to give out.

And then Andrew caught on to why the others were so little reluctant to give out what they had. He broke off a piece of bread to give to one of the people lying there—there were thousands of them—and when he looked back at what he had left, it was as big as it had been before he broke any off. As a kind of experiment, he asked the man he had just supplied with bread if he wished for fish also, and gave him fully half of what he had—and tried to pay careful attention to what was happening. But one must blink, it seemed, and then or some other time when he was not absolutely attentive, what he had broken off grew back.

Try as he might, he could not see it happen; it just happened, and he kept giving bread and fish from his little store of it, and must have fed hundreds of people with what he

had. Incredible!

Everyone became more and more excited, when they saw what was happening. And of course Simon the Revolutionary was taking advantage of it saying, “You see? Your King is feeding you! With five loaves of bread and two little fish! And there are thousands of you! I have been counting. You must be five thousand men or more, not even counting the women and children! And all of you are being fed on these five loaves by your King! Or is Caesar your King? Or who is?”

And as he passed from group to group in the throng, the word “King” began to swell from the crowd like a chorus, and when finally the students came around with baskets to collect the leftovers and eventually filled twelve with what people no longer wanted, the cry of “King!” became a roar, as the people stood up, evidently to go up to Jesus and lift him on their shoulders and take him—to Jerusalem, to anywhere, they knew not; they were simply inflamed with enthusiasm.

But quickly the swell of hosannas turned into a confused, “Where is he?” and Simon began running among them, from one student to the next, asking who had seen Jesus last. The most that could be gleaned was that he had been there, but had slipped away while everyone was distracted with collecting the marvelous harvest from the five loaves. “But he cannot have gone!” screamed Simon in anguish. “It is the perfect moment! Where is he?”

Nathanael put a long hand on his shoulder and turned him around. “Obviously,” he said, “he does not want to be King.”

“What do you mean, ‘does not want to be’? He *is* our King.”

“Then where is he?”

“That is what I want to know!” he shouted, and broke free. He ran off into the woods at the top of the hill, where Jesus must have gone; and after a short while came back, protesting and sputtering for people to help him look for the Master. But the others said that the Master knew what he was doing, and that if he wanted to be made King, he would appear and allow himself to be proclaimed King; but if he did not, everyone here could search the whole hill, and he would be nowhere to be found.

Simon would not calm down for a considerable time, well after the crowd had thinned out a great deal, and night had begun to fall; and even then, all he did was hang sulking about the periphery of the little band of students.

They, on the other hand, were ebullient. “Did you see Philip’s face,” laughed John’s brother James, “when the Master asked him how we were to buy bread to feed all these people?”

“Well how was I to know what he planned to do?” said Philip, evoking a roar of laughter in everyone, who continued teasing him unmercifully in their joy, while some related anecdotes about the people in the crowd, how everyone tried to find out how the bread multiplied itself—and no one, not even the students, could fathom it; there simply always was more. Like everything Jesus did, it was perfectly simple, and perfectly impossible to understand.

Twenty-Seven

BUT NIGHT WAS FALLING Apace, and Jesus was still somewhere on the hill—or nowhere, or perhaps already in Capernaum. “What shall we do?” they asked each other. “He told us we were to be in Capernaum tomorrow. Shall we wait, or get into the boat now?”

“There is only the one boat,” said Simon Rock, “and”—looking at Mary—“there are more of us now than when we came over. Will we all fit in?”

“Do not concern yourself,” said Thomas. “It is a fine night, though it looks as if there might be a wind later. You go ahead in the boat if you think you want to risk it, in case he has somehow gone ahead of us. I will walk, and see you there probably around noon.” He asked if anyone wanted to accompany him, and Simon the Revolutionary, who was not very interested in chitchat, volunteered, as did Mary and a few others, including women who were driving donkeys with bundles of the group’s nomadic provisions.

John and James took two of the oars, with the Rock and Andrew behind them (that is, toward the bow). Andrew, as he

rowed, looked fondly at John, whom he thought he had lost as a friend, and then found again. With all the blows to his complacency lately, it warmed his heart to think there was still someone who admired him—and someone as bright and talented as John. Life was good, as they flew over the water toward the middle of the “sea,” which was the direct route to where they were going.

But after a short while, the conversation among those riding died down, as people looked up at the sky and saw the stars disappear. Nathanael, of course, was looking at the blackness invading the whole sky, and had broken into a sweat despite the chill; he gripped the gunwale fiercely, trying not to panic. Then it broke. Wind and horizontal-blowing rain.

The four oarsmen dug in with all their might as the waves rose, and everyone silently pulled with them mentally, as they struggled harder and harder. In a short while, Philip took over John’s oar, and James the Owl that of his namesake (James was a good deal stronger than his hemming and hawing made him appear.), and Judas, who was obviously strong, spelled Andrew, and Thaddeus, of all people, took over from the Rock, who came to the stern beside Matthew, where Thaddeus had been sitting, and looked out, panting.

Andrew was more tired than he would like to admit; he had not been seriously rowing for nearly a year now, and it was much more work than he remembered. He sat on the seat at the side and looked down at his feet, too exhausted even to see if there was a break in the clouds in the distance, as sometimes happened with these sudden squalls.

Suddenly, the Rock straightened and cried, “Behold!”

“What is it?” came from several voices. The oarsmen were

too busy trying to hold the boat on course.

“It looks like the Master!” Andrew looked up where Simon pointed, and it *did* appear that there was someone out *there*—*walking* toward them!

“The Master?” said John’s brother. “What boat could he be in? Ours was the only one.”

“He is not in a boat! He is walking over the water!”

“What?” “Where?” “You are out of your mind!”

“Look there astern! See for yourselves!”

“It *is* the Master!” “It is a ghost! They have killed him!” “Who is out of his mind now?” “How can anyone walk on top of the water? You are all seeing things!”

“No, it is truly the Master!” shouted the Rock over the roar of the storm. “Master, if it is you, tell me to come to you over the water!” Andrew cringed. How like him!

“Come!” came the voice—clearly, Jesus’s voice.

The Rock stepped out of the boat and took a few steps toward Jesus—and then made the mistake of looking down. Immediately, he sank. “Master! Help!” How like him again! And *this* is the one chosen to lead us!

Jesus was suddenly up to him, reached out his hand, and lifted him up. “You skeptic!” he said, in an amused, not unkindly tone. “Why did you doubt?” He brought the Rock up to the boat, and both climbed in.

—And suddenly, the wind and rain stopped, and they found that they were on the shore they had been trying to reach. No one said a word, all cowed by what they had witnessed. Not only food, but even the winds and the sea were his slaves, and did his bidding at not even a word, but a mere nod of his head.

Well, thought Andrew, of course they would be if he was who he said he was. And if he could do this, who else could he be?

He saw Matthew glance over at Judas, as overwhelmed as all the rest. He was struggling, it seemed, to see if this fit in with his view of what Jesus was, and making adjustments to his theory. Not an easy task, but Judas would probably manage it. After all, Jesus was supposedly full of the force that fashioned the universe. How *easy* it was to explain it all away! —But if he was mad, he was mad in just this way from the beginning. There was no question of its gradually creeping up on him.

They found a sheltered, dry spot and caught a blessed couple of hours of sleep, and then proceeded to the synagogue in Capernaum in silence, everyone too tired to talk—and, it must be said, too overwhelmed with the miraculous bread and the command Jesus had over the elements to think of anything to say.

Outside the synagogue, Jesus again found himself surrounded by a crowd, many of whom had come round already by land, or perhaps in other boats that went by, from where they had been staying. They had informed the rest about the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the whole crowd was abuzz. Jesus, however, did not speak with anyone until they were in the synagogue, and everyone had settled down a bit because they were in a holy place.

Finally, he sat down and looked at them. “Rabbi, when did you get here?” someone asked before he could begin speaking. They had seen the students go alone into the boat, and there were no other boats there.

“Amen amen I tell you,” said Jesus solemnly, “you are not

looking for me because you saw evidence; you are here because you had a meal and filled yourselves with the bread. Do not be bothering about food that spoils; pay attention to food that stays fresh for eternal life: food that the Son of Man will give you, because this is the task the Father has assigned to him.”

So the miraculous bread was a sign—but of what? Jesus seemed to be saying that it was a sign of some kind of food. Was this to be the food that would end all hunger? Was this how the Kingdom was to begin?

But they ignored it. They were more interested, obviously, in how they could have Jesus repeat what he had done for them. “But what are we supposed to do,” they asked “if we are to concern ourselves with what God wants of us?”

“God’s task for you,” answered Jesus, “is for you to believe in the one he sent.”

Well, if Jesus was going to give them “true food,” then they would have to believe that he could do it; the bread and the fish were just an indication: a sign.

“Very well,” they answered, “but how do you go about proving that *you* are the one we are to believe in? What *is* this task God has given you? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, after all, as it says in Scripture, ‘He gave them bread *from heaven* to eat.’” Andrew felt like shouting at them, “You fools! What do you think Jesus has *done*, just yesterday? Where do you think that extra bread came from?”

But Jesus was unperturbed. But he was deadly serious, Andrew could see. He prefaced what he was saying with his formulaic, “Amen amen I tell you,” and then continued, “Moses did not give you bread *from heaven*.” He emphasized the word as his questioner had done, “but my Father will give

you bread that really does come from heaven. God's bread is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." There it was. He was the bread, somehow.

"Ah! Then give us this bread, Master, all the time!"

"I am the bread that comes down from heaven," said Jesus. "A person who comes to me will never be hungry, and one who believes in me will never feel thirst." It sounded to Andrew as if the relief from hunger and thirst would begin when a person really believed who Jesus was. Andrew thought that he clearly did not really believe as yet, then.

And he heard the people say to each other, "You see? It was nothing but 'listen to me' all over again. Bread from heaven indeed! One could *eat* the manna!"

"I told you," answered Jesus, "you saw the evidence just now, and yet you still do not believe me. But everyone my Father gave me comes to me, and I will not turn my back on anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven to do the will of the one who sent me, not what I please."

So now he had made the bald claim that he came down from heaven, and was evidently sent by God, whose will he was fulfilling. This was indeed a pivotal speech he was making, prepared for by the multiplication of ordinary bread.

At this point, Mary, who had walked around the shore, came into the synagogue, and Matthew went over to her immediately. Andrew could not make up his mind whether he was full of pity for Matthew, who was headed for trouble whether Mary was reformed or not—especially since he seemed to have no idea that he had more than an avuncular interest in her—or whether, if she *was* reformed, he should think of him as a rival.

Andrew lost what Jesus was saying because of the interruption, but whatever it was, it did not sit well with the congregation. They were grumbling to themselves more and more loudly, saying things like, “Is this not the Jesus that is Joseph’s son?” Another answered, “It is. We know his father and mother. How can he claim that he ‘came down from heaven’?”

“What are you complaining about?” said Jesus. “No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me—and then I will bring him to life on the last day. There is a prophesy, ‘They will all be instructed by God.’ Everyone who has listened to the Father and learned from him comes to me; no one has seen the Father except the one who is at God’s side. He has seen the Father.”

So now he was saying not only that he had come from the Father, but that he “is” at God’s side—presumably now, while he is here—and “has seen” the Father—from all eternity? The Pharisees doubtless would make much of this. But the people had begun to listen.

“—has eternal life.” he was saying. “I am bread for life. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert and died; but this is bread that comes down from heaven for people to eat and not die. I am living bread that comes down from heaven, and if anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.” He paused, seemed to be inspired by an idea, stroking his beard in his characteristic way, and then continued, “And the bread I am to give you is the meat of my body, for the life of the world.”

What was this? What was this? He is going to give us as bread *the meat of his own body*?

The people reacted in the same way.

“How can this man give us the meat of his body to eat?” said the people to each other. Andrew looked over at Mary, recalling Judas’s words that Jesus soon would make some claim that no one could accept, and expect them to believe it. Mary cover her eyes with her hands.

It certainly *sounded* insane. But he had stroked his beard, probably meaning that a way to do this had occurred to him. But it would have to be a way that was not cannibalism!

And *Andrew* would have to find a way to trust that he had found the way. How, it was impossible to predict. But he was *not* a madman, and he *had* found a way. He *had to* have found a way!

Jesus evidently heard the congregation, but instead of explaining himself, he went on, “Amen amen I tell you that if you do *not* eat the meat which is the Son of Man’s body—and drink his blood!—” The congregation gasped once again, “—you will not have life in you!” Jesus seemed more intense now than he had ever been.

So he was not going to explain himself. He was asking them all to believe that they would *somehow* eat the meat of his body and drink his blood, and it would be salvific, not disgusting.

This was the acid test. He would either find believers, or he had sealed his doom, and he obviously knew it, because he was looking more around at the Twelve than at everyone else. Matthew stared at him open-mouthed, and Mary was about to weep. Judas was looking at the floor, shaking his head.

“—meat which is my body is real food, and my blood is real drink. Anyone who eats the meat of my body and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him. Just as my living Father sent

me and I live through the Father, anyone who eats me will live through me. *This* is the bread that comes down from heaven. Not what your ancestors ate. They died. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever!”

. People were now saying, “That is disgusting! How can anyone listen to it?”

Jesus looked around at all of them, as they murmured to one another in their outrage. But still he did not explain himself. “You find that difficult to accept, do you not? What if you were to see the Son of Man rise up to where he was before? Spirit is what gives life; matter is of no use at all; and what I have told you is spirit and life, and there are some of you who do not believe it!”

Could it be that it was a metaphor indicating that he would be killed and his blood be spilled by the people and that very death would save them? They would be “eating the meat” which they had butchered and drunk the blood they had spilled, and this crime would be used to remit their sins. If taken in that sense, it would be a “spiritual” eating and drinking. It was far-fetched, but Andrew could believe something like that.

As Jesus looked out at his increasingly thinning audience, it seemed that there was not one of them who believed—understood!—what he was saying; even Andrew himself was not sure if he himself believed, unless it had only this metaphorical meaning.

Well, Andrew could trust that at the proper time, it would all make sense. Jesus simply could not be anything but the Son of the Living God, as Simon had called him; after all, he had just walked on top of a heaving sea! No, it was no surprise to

find that most people simply dismissed what he was saying as crazy.

“—why I said that no one can come to me unless he is given the power to do it by my Father.”

But Jesus was now talking to the backs of the congregation, who were streaming out the doors saying that he might be able to cure the sick, but he was mad, and anyone who listened to him was as mad as he.

And was not this just what Judas had predicted? Andrew looked at Mary again, and saw that this was exactly what she was thinking. That man was poison!

Finally, there were left merely the Twelve and one or two others. Jesus looked at them, as they gazed expectantly at him, all of them hoping—praying—for an explanation, such as those he would give them privately about his stories. But Jesus said, with infinite sorrow, “Do you wish to go away too?”

There was a dead silence, and a few shuffled their feet. One or two—not of the Twelve—did leave, shaking their heads in disillusionment. Judas was among those who stayed; but he had his eyes fixed on the mosaic on the floor beneath him, almost in embarrassment.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, Simon Rock spoke up, with tears in his voice. “Master, to whom would we go? We know that what you say is eternal life, and—and we have believed that you are the Holy One of God. We—we know this.”

Jesus smiled poignantly at the masterful effort. “Did I not choose you twelve?” he said. Then his eyes lifted themselves to the mountains on the other side of the lake and beyond them to the infinity he had just said he had come from, and added,

“And one of you is a devil!”

So he knew. Of course he knew. How could he not know, if he was who he was and not what Judas thought he was?

Twenty-Eight

The next day, after a night of very little sleep, Andrew was walking about, pondering what he had heard and trying to find some way—some “spiritual” way, that people could eat the meat of Jesus’s body and drink his blood; but the only thing he could think of was the metaphor of killing him and being saved by his death. But that was so strained that it could not really be what Jesus meant. And he *had* predicted his death and resurrection, so why do it in these esoteric terms? But what other sense could it have?

He happened to look up from his musings, and saw John, and decided he would go and see what he thought. But as he approached him (he was at quite a distance), he saw him go over to Ezra and start a conversation. Andrew, who felt uncomfortable around the black man, though he had nothing against him, thought he would not join them, and was about to turn away, when something strange happened, and he stared, fascinated.

Ezra had gone behind John, as if to test something John

was saying, and hugged him, pinning his arms. Andrew thought he had seen James do this once or twice to keep John from one of the tantrums he used to throw. Perhaps John had been explaining what James had done to him, and Ezra was asking whether this was what it was.

But then Ezra went back in front of John, and smiled and licked his lips—and then went up to John and hugged him from in front, *and kissed him, deeply!* Andrew was shocked.

They stayed together for perhaps half a minute, and then Ezra put his hand over John's privates and took John's hand and put it over his own, which was creating an enormous bulge in his tunic. At this, Andrew wanted to turn away in disgust, but kept watching, to see if John would start a fight, and perhaps might need his help.

John, however, took his hand away and put it against Ezra's chest, and pushed—but it seemed feebly—and Ezra backed off a step or two and held up his hands as if in surrender. The two stood there, looking at each other, panting. With desire?

Ezra made some remark, which John answered. it seemed that John did not, after all, want to go on with this, in spite of the fact that his own tunic showed that he was aroused also. It was as if John was trying to explain to Ezra why he did not want to do anything, and Ezra was answering that he saw nothing wrong with it. (Ezra was even playing with his organ.) Nothing wrong with it! Well, he was a slave and an African; what could one expect?

At any rate, after some more words on both sides (Andrew was too far away to hear even the sounds), Ezra seemed to ask if John were angry, and John went over to him

and gave him a—brief, to be sure—hug, and they parted.

So *that* was John's secret vice! How loathsome!

—On the other hand, if it were his secret vice, he was obviously struggling against it, because there was no question of the fact that he was attracted to Ezra. But what did that hug mean? It *looked* as if it meant, "Let us be friends, but no more than that." Ezra seemed to have spotted John's attraction and responded to it; but John did not want to act on the attraction. But still did not want to treat Ezra as scum. How could he, if he was attracted to him? It was so complicated!

—And then Andrew thought of his own attraction to Mary Magdalene. He could not help it, and he fought against it, but it *would* assert itself against his will. Was he so very different from John, then? Why should he treat *her* as scum, now that she was reformed?

"Of course, I could get married to her, and how could he marry Ezra?" he said aloud, and then realized what he was saying. He, marrying Mary Magdalene! The most notorious prostitute and corrupter of men in all of Judea and Galilee! His wife! "As well fold a cobra!" he remembered. Granted she was reformed—if she was—but think how many men had had her! And perhaps she had children or even abortions from them!

"But it is *still* not the same thing!" The very thought of what John and Ezra would do to each other—which had only the vaguest form in Andrew's mind—made him want to vomit. How could they? How could *John*, of all people!

But of course John did *not* do those things, apparently; he resisted Ezra—who Andrew could easily believe would have no problem doing them, whatever they were. But on the other hand, Ezra, from what he saw as he looked at Mary, had no

difficulty being attracted to her also. Ezra just had a very loose, it seemed, view of such matters.

At any rate, it seemed that John and John's attraction were very similar, morally speaking, to Andrew and his attraction to Mary. In both cases, it was an attraction that one wanted nothing to do with, but which was there in spite of oneself, and which one struggled to keep nothing more than an involuntary attraction. So why should he despise John, if he did not despise himself?

"But John's attraction is perverse—" and mine is not? Is it not perverse to want what he saw was completely unacceptable? "But it is not unnatural, and John's is!" But what difference did that make, if the object of the desire was a person who could not fulfill it?

"It is not the same thing!"

Granted, but is it different in anything relevant?

The point is that both he and John wanted something that they should not pursue, let alone fulfill; and both resisted the impulse and wished they did not have the impulse—at least based on what Andrew saw.

And in fact, when one thought upon it, John resisted under much more serious circumstances than Andrew ever did. Could Andrew resist if Mary actually made advances to him? His incipient arousal at the very idea was a good clue as to what the answer would be. So John's virtue was greater than his probably would be; and so why should he despise him, and be disgusted at the thought of him, as he now was?

That was the point at issue, was it not? His automatic disgust was not against John as a *person*, but against what John *would be* if he gave in to his impulses—just as Andrew was

anything but admirable if he gave in to his envious impulses against Simon and his impulses of superiority against those who did not seem as clever or virtuous as he regarded himself.

—But how did John *get* those impulses? But then how did Andrew get his? They were just there. But nature gave John his? Not any nature Andrew was familiar with! But how was that *John's* fault?

Perhaps he had done something when he was younger. But then why was he resisting now? And why, if he *had* done something, did it not disgust him as Andrew's contemplation of it disgusted *him*? And Andrew had not see the slightest sign that John was attracted to the effeminate boys in the neighborhood. He made fun of them just as everyone did. To cover up his attraction? But Andrew could not remember the least hint that there *was* an attraction.

Of course, he was not looking for one.

This was ridiculous! John was, as far as anyone could see, perfectly normal—until just this moment. And Ezra was hardly a man-woman either. They were both very masculine.

But the *point* was that John, if he had these impulses—and it certainly seemed obvious that he *had* them, however he got them—did not want to act on them, and so we were back to his impulses and Andrew's attraction to Mary—which, if it was natural, was still an impulse that Andrew had no intention of acting on.

He then remembered something that Jesus had said a few weeks ago; something that puzzled him at the time. They had been talking of divorce, which Jesus said was never permitted, and he then said something to the effect that there are eunuchs that were made so by nature and other eunuchs that were made

so by men, but that it was a blessing for one to make himself a eunuch for the Kingdom.

It did not make much of an impression on Andrew at the time, but now that he thought upon it, it seemed to mean that “it was a blessing” to keep oneself a virgin and never marry. He seemed to recall Simon’s saying that if one could not get divorced, it made no sense to marry, and Jesus answered with this business about eunuchs.

That is, it seemed to indicate that it was better to stay as he was—something that, until Mary appeared, he had no particular trouble with. And now that Mary *did* appear, it certainly *did* make no sense to marry!

Or something. The whole thing was nauseating!

Oh, yes, Andrew, you are a paragon! You despise people like John who are saints, because of the sins they are *not* committing and are in fact *resisting*—and you do precious little to resist your own vicious impulses! You did not even know you *had* them until just recently! What did Jesus say the other day? “You impose impossible burdens on people, and do not lift a finger to help them!”

—So what to do? Should he avoid John? Why? John was no “danger” to him. Was he a danger to John? He saw no indication of it. *Mary* should be the one he ought to avoid, if anyone. No, he should not avoid John, and should keep being his friend—which warmed his soul, since John so obviously admired him. John was still John, and no worse because of what his temptations were—in fact, perhaps better as a person because of them and his resistance. All of us have temptations; but temptations are not sins.

Still, he hoped he could do it. John felt repulsive to him

now. Well, if he could be decent with Mary and not either flee her or pursue her, but simply treat her as a person, why could he not do this with John, who was *in fact* admirable in so many ways?

Life was full of complications.

Fortunately, he soon had a distraction. Jesus and the students were, as usual, in a synagogue, (Andrew wondered how he had got there, he had been so lost in thought) and Andrew noticed that his popularity was still high despite what he had said the other day, probably because he continued to perform cures that were increasingly amazing; and so the synagogue was as packed as before. After a short while, there was a stirring from outside, and eventually word came through to the front that Jesus's mother and relatives were at the door, wanting to see him.

"Who is my mother?" said Jesus when he heard this, "and who are my relatives?" He raised his hand and waved it over the congregation. "Here are my mother and relatives. Anyone who listens to what God says and acts on it is my mother and my sister and my brother." So now his relatives were "spiritual" relatives. There was more spiritual significance to everything as the hours went on. God grant that the spiritual significance of eating the meat of his body would come out soon!

He looked over at John, who obviously had his own serious troubles—which Andrew could imagine. He even heard him once say aloud, "Stop that!" and look around, to see if anyone heard.

Jesus, having heard the news about his relatives, curtailed his discourse and went outside, where he found his mother and a number of people Andrew had only seen in passing: Jesus's

cousins.

“I would not disturb you,” she said in calm voice, “but they insisted that they wished to speak with you as soon as possible—and finally, I told them I would see what I could do.”

“They understood well the best approach,” said Jesus. Then he turned to a group of two or three others who were with her. “But you knew that there was no necessity for this. I am still what I was; I have not changed from the time we played at castles and soldiers in these very streets. I am not some Caesar, who grants audiences.”

“True,” said a thin, pale man, half a head taller than Jesus. He was a little younger, it seemed, perhaps in his late twenties. He fingered his robe nervously, and temporized, “It was the crowd. We tried to get by them to see you, and could not force our way in—and we thought that if you knew we were outside, you would come out to meet us.”

It was obvious that this was a half-truth, perhaps even a little less. At least in this man’s case, the fact that his playmate had become a miracle-worker and a preacher of such intense power had intimidated him.

“Actually,” said a very brown man whose beard was beginning to be grizzled, though his hair was still black. He had enormous eyebrows and a nose rather more sharp than most, “I was the one who wanted to see you before I left to go back to Alexandria. We are both too busy, are we not?”

“I do seem to be rather occupied at present, James,” replied Jesus. “I am sorry I did not make more leisure to have a long chat. You leave soon?”

Ah, this must be the James that Andrew had heard had

gone to live in Alexandria, wherever that was. That was fortunate, since the group did not have to contend with three Jameses.

“—morrow, I fear. Business. But I have heard much about you—in fact, there are a few stirrings as far away as Egypt, would you believe, and not simply among the relatives you have there, either. Not much, you understand, but your name begins to be mentioned now and again. And that was my real motive for speaking to you. You must leave this place for Judea so that you will have an audience for what you do. People do not do great deeds in secret, they want to be noticed. If you *are* a magician, you must go show yourself to the world.”

Evidently Alexandria was in Egypt. This man must be a merchant of some sort. Clearly, he had not actually seen what Jesus had been doing, if he thought of him as a “magician.”

The others nodded, and the first one said, “The Festival of the Booths is near. You could come down with us. We would be delighted to have you.”

Jesus smiled at them, and said, “Thank you for your concern, James—to all of you,” with a special nod at James, “but the right time has not come for me yet. For you, any time would be a good time, because the world does not hate you. But the fact is that it hates me, because what I do proves to it that its deeds are evil.”

James tried to make a demurrer, and Jesus answered his thought, “No, I am deadly serious. You go down to the festival; I cannot accompany you, I am afraid. It might be dangerous.”

They made polite noises of insistence, but they were

short-lived. The rumors of Jesus's wild statements had doubtless reached them, and these last remarks of his tended more than anything to confirm suspicions that he might indeed be mad.

"Well," said James, "I thought it a good idea to propose it; but I can see that it has already occurred to you, and doubtless you have good and sufficient reason for what you are doing. As to me, of course, I must go and make myself ready for the journey. Some one of these days, we must get together and talk. And if you ever do come down to Alexandria, my house, as always, is open; and you can be sure that I will put in a word in certain circles and see to it that you are well received. From what I have been hearing, if you continue as you have been doing, there will not be a sick person left in Galilee or any of the surrounding countryside."

The others murmured assent, and each found an excuse to leave. They clearly did not know what to make of this new person, for all of his protestations that he had not changed.

Finally, only Jesus' mother remained, greeting all the students. John seemed especially happy to see her. Had he not consulted with her before he went down to Jerusalem to study? She walked back with them to the place where they were staying, which was not an encampment this time, but various houses in and around Capernaum. She was staying there also, not in Nazareth.

She remained with them the night and the Rock and John prevailed upon her to stay for most of the next day also. It passed with little fanfare, like a day in the middle of Spring, which one does not notice while it is passing, because it is a kind of paradigm of what a day should be, and only afterwards

reflects on its peace and contentment, wishing it could have continued forever.

Everyone had already been gone for two days to the celebration in Jerusalem before Jesus said that he had decided to go after all, and the group left, going along the Jordan once again.

And on the trip, sure enough John took Jesus aside, and had a long conversation with him—which Andrew could wager was about what happened with Ezra, and what he should do. Well, it just showed that John was an admirable person, and not one to be avoided.

Jesus said something in parting that was loud enough for Andrew to hear: “And do not be afraid, because of all this, to love me. Do not be afraid to love anyone, in fact. Or to express it by a hug, for instance—but not as David would wish you to.” Whoever David was. But that was, as with everything Jesus did, meant to be overheard by Andrew. He was not to be afraid to express his love for John by a hug either.

Twenty-Nine

They ARRIVED in JERUSALEM AT evening, and went to the Gethsemani garden again, and because they had traveled severally through the night by different routes (since Jesus did not want in known where the whole group was going), Andrew entered looking for John when he arrived. He found him apparently talking to himself; but when his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness, it turned out that he was conversing with Ezra, who was all but invisible. He kept himself apart, wondering if they were mere friends.

“—cannot keep it in!” Ezra was exclaiming in a whisper. That fiend! That devil! put a *tarantula* in Bartholomew’s pouch during the night! I saw him do something to the pouch, but did not realize what it was. And then early this morning, for the first time, he condescended to notice my existence—we were traveling together—and asked me to go to Jacob’s well for water. Bartholomew had not waked yet. When I came back, Judas was gone, and Bartholomew was in a panic. He had put his hand into his pouch, and felt the spider—he has a deadly

fear of spiders—and almost could not speak! He must pay for this! And dearly!”

“Did it bite him?”

“No, but it frightened him half to death!” He disappeared again, looking for Judas.

John, also left, but fortunately was visible, and Andrew followed, losing him for a while in a wood beside a stream. But after a time, he noticed two men, naked, who had evidently stripped for a fight, writhing on the ground. The one on top looked like Judas, and the other (who was difficult to see beneath him), could easily be John.

But at the moment, at least, it did not look much like a fight; it seemed that they were engaged in sex, judging by the motions that Judas was making—but John also, if it *was* John.

He thought he heard Judas pant, “Admit it, you enjoy it!” Good God!

John stopped struggling, which did not stop Judas, and so he resumed, now struggling harder, and it seemed to Andrew that he was trying—as he had been trying, perhaps, to extricate himself; but if so, Judas had him thoroughly pinned, and struggling was only making matters worse. And not long after came the release, and they lay still, both of them, until finally Judas stood up and said something to John—it *was* John, Andrew could now see—and left.

John just lay there.

Andrew turned away in disgust. But then as he walked away, it occurred to him that perhaps Judas had injured him, and he might need help. He turned back and heard John sob, “How *could* I have let him *do* that!” Then, with tears streaming down his face, he grabbed his tunic and mantle and rushed

over to the stream, where he began frantically to wash himself, saying over and over, “How *could* I? How *could* I? How *could* I? How *could* I?”

Andrew saw that this was the worst time to show himself to John, who evidently was not hurt, and so he walked for a long time in the woods. His feeling of disgust at the whole episode was all but overwhelming, and almost made him hate John for doing such things.

But as he calmed down somewhat, it occurred to him that *John* was also overcome by disgust—and guilt that he had not prevented it! He had been overpowered by Judas, who doubtless was “teaching him a lesson,” as he had taught Nathanael with the tarantula Ezra spoke of, and—and Thomas with the wine instead of water.

“One of you is a devil!” Jesus had said. It was obvious which one. But what could he be thinking? Why would he do such things? Was it pure malice, hatred for those who were trying to be faithful followers of Jesus? He found the weakness of each person and exploited it—presumably to show that it was a waste of time to follow Jesus and to try to correct one’s faults, because they remained after over a year of effort.

Judas had failed in following Jesus, and he wanted everyone else connected with Jesus to fail. He was a menace!

Poor John! Obviously, he could not mention this to him, for that would only add to John’s humiliation. He resolved to show special friendship to him; he needed someone he admired to be his friend right now.

So he went back to the garden to see if he could catch some sleep for the rest of the night—and saw that John had also returned, and was tossing in a fitful sleep, from the

reaction to what he had been through.

As the group rose the next morning, Andrew went with them to the Temple, noticing that John was now sleeping the sleep of exhaustion. Well, he would find them when he woke.

It must have been around noon when he arrived; and to Andrew's joy, he went beside him in the crowd around Jesus. Andrew put his arm over his shoulder and drew him to himself, as they heard Jesus say,

“—give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's,” at which everyone laughed and commented, “Excellent!” “Look at their faces! They are enraged!” John looked at Andrew, who said, “They asked him if one should pay taxes to Caesar or not, and he asked for a denarius and asked whose image was on it, you see.”

But while Andrew was saying this, some others dragged a woman forward, her hair askew and robes rumped, struggling to free herself from their grasp. They stood her in front of Jesus.

“Rabbi, this woman has been arrested in the very act of adultery; and Moses in the Law has commanded us to stone her sort. What do you have to say about it?”

The crowd fell silent once again; and to Andrew, the dilemma was obvious. If Jesus dismissed her, he was violating the Law; but how could a man who claimed to be able to forgive sins stone a sinner? John pointed at someone in the crowd opposite them

“Is that not Mary Magdalene?” he asked Andrew.

“Knew you not?” She is actually the sister of Martha and Lazarus!” Andrew had heard a rumor to this effect, and realized it must be true, because there was Martha beside her.

John drew in his breath. “Do they know?”

“Not yet, it seems. To them, she is just the long-lost sister returned because of Jesus.”

“Dear God! What will happen when they find out?”

“That is what everyone is wondering.”

Jesus, who seemed a bit nonplused by the difficulty the woman presented, kept a calm face. He sat there on the step, tracing his finger in the dust beside him, then erasing the patterns he made. “Should she be stoned or not, according to your view of God’s Law?” said the accuser. Then he added with a sneer, “Do you find the answer there in the dust?”

At this, Jesus straightened up and looked him directly in the eyes. “Have some sinless one among you,” he said, “be the first to throw a stone.” And again he bent over and resumed writing in the dust.

But now he seemed to be writing something legible, and as he glanced up, ostensibly to see if anyone had picked up a stone, he looked at his questioner and gave the slightest nod toward what he had written—at which the man’s face flamed, and he turned away. Jesus erased what was there, wrote something else, and looked up again. By this time, several people had already left, and the one whose eyes he now met did not bother to glance down at the writing, but quietly pretended that he had not even seen Jesus, and moved away also.

It did not require many glances up from what he had been doing for the crowd to become remarkably sparse; and then Jesus wrote in the ground and looked straight at John and Andrew.

“What does it say?” said Andrew to John. He could not

read.

“It says, ‘Rape. See me.’ What could it mean?” Puzzled, they stood there as everyone else dispersed. Jesus looked at the woman, and said, “Where are they, Madame? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, Sir,” she said.

“Nor do I condemn you. Go in peace.” She hurried off.

Jesus beckoned to John and Andrew, who were the only ones left. “I wanted to tell you why I did not stone the woman. I could not. You see, I knew what the situation really was.”

The two stood silent. “She loved a man very much, but he was married. He met her, and told her he wanted to go away with her. She wished very much to do so, but told him that she could not, for he was married, and she could not go with a married man. At this, he seized her, threw her on a couch, and raped her. In spite of herself, she experienced great pleasure in what he was doing, though she kept struggling to free herself. And it was at this point that the others came upon them and brought her to me.

“She herself felt guilty because she had experienced pleasure from the act; but all the time, she was trying to avoid and escape it. She was guilty of nothing in fact, because pleasure and pain are automatic and beyond our control. It was what she wanted and tried to do that was her true self, not what she felt. She had no need to feel guilt at all.”

He looked intently at Andrew, who immediately saw the application to John, and thoughtfully nodded; and then he looked at John. It was as much to say, “You have no guilt whatever in what Judas did to you, no matter how you felt

about it.”

“Thank you, Master,” said John, softly, and Andrew said, “Yes. I understand. Thank you.”

“Go in peace now, and stop worrying so much.” He smiled a loving smile upon them both.

Each was aware that what he had said had a special meaning for the other person, and each knew that that meaning was to remain private to the person. They looked at each other silently, and went their separate ways.

Andrew remembered Jesus’s saying to John, “Do not be afraid to love anyone, or even to hug him,” and now he was telling John, “and if something happens against your will, do not be guilt-ridden about it. It was no sin.” And obviously, Andrew’s feeling of disgust at what he saw was something to try to overcome, because it involved no sin at all on John’s part. Jesus had confirmed what he had thought.

Did he not hear Jesus’s voice? He wandered in that direction. Was he not saying, “You will die in your sins”? It sounded like it.

He came up within earshot, and heard Jesus say, “If you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins!”

Here it was beginning! Not, “if you do not believe *what* I am, but if you do not believe *that* I am. He was using God’s name to refer to himself, and saying that we must believe in who he is: one and the same as the Father. It was not perfectly clear that that was what he was saying, but it almost bore no other interpretation.

And the night of the storm, when he walked to them on the water, did he not say, “I AM, be not afraid”?

The sense that he was calling himself God Almighty,

however, was lost on the crowd. But he then said, “When you lift up the Son of Man”—and he held his arms out in the form of a cross. *The form of a cross!*—“you will recognize what I AM, and that I do nothing by myself and only say what the Father has taught me.” A step closer; but it implied that it would become clear only with Jesus’s crucifixion!

But at this, some of the people turned away in disgust. “He never comes out and says he is the Prince, and keeps telling us conundrums! He is a waste of time!”

But Jesus was saying to those who remained. “—real students of mine. You will recognize what the truth is, and the truth will set you free.” Andrew was sure that *he* recognized the truth.

“We are children of Abraham,” said someone in the crowd. “We have never been slaves. How can you tell us we will be set free?”

“Amen amen I tell you,” said Jesus, “anyone who commits a sin is a slave; and a slave does not stay in the family forever. The Son stays in it forever. And if the Son frees you, you really will be free.”

Andrew thought, And the Son has freed John from his guilt, and now he really is free! How glorious!

“—telling you,” said Jesus, “what I saw with the Father, and you are doing what you heard from your father!”

“Our father is Abraham!” they shouted.

“If you are Abraham’s children, then act like Abraham!” Jesus countered. “But no! You are trying to kill me, a person who has spoken to you of the facts he heard from God! Abraham did not do that sort of thing. No, you are doing what your real father does.”

“We are not bastards!” shouted the crowd. “We have the one God for our father!”

Jesus said sadly, “If God were your father, you would love me,” said Jesus, “because I came from God. And I did not come of myself; he sent me. Then why can you not understand what I say? Because you cannot hear my words! You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and could not bear the truth, because the truth was not in him. And when he tells lies, he does what is natural to himself, because he is a liar, and the father of liars. And when I tell you what the truth is, you do not believe me!”

The people were making outraged cries that he was the one who had a devil. Jesus looked out over them with anger and said, “Can any one of you name one sin that I have committed? Then if I tell you what the truth is, why do you not believe it? Anyone who belongs to God can hear what God says—and so you cannot hear, because you do not belong to God!”

The silly things they had against Jesus, such as telling the cripple to take his mat and walk, were all that they could allege against him—and who would say that such a thing was a sin? But what else did they have, except his claim that he came from God? And how could that be a sin, if it was true?

“—men I tell you,” said Jesus, “Anyone who keeps what I say will never see death!” What was that? He was promising that if they followed him, they would never die!

“Now we *know* you are out of your mind!” shouted someone in the crowd. “Abraham died, and so did the prophets! And you say”—he repeated Jesus’s words with bitter

sarcasm—“that if anyone ‘keeps what you say’ he will not taste death forever! Are you greater than our ancestor Abraham? Who died! Or the prophets? Who died! Just who are you making yourself out to be?” The crowd roared assent.

Jesus looked out at them and let them calm down somewhat. Then he raised his hand for silence, and said calmly, “If I were to tell you how great I am, my greatness would be nothing. But there is my Father,” he pointed to the sanctuary of the Temple, “who is *showing* how great I am. He is the one you call your God—but you do not recognize him. But I know him. If I said I did not know him, I would be a liar like you. I do know him, because I came from him, and he sent me!”

Now he was saying that he came from God, and God sent him. But he had called himself “I AM” just a short while ago.

Then Jesus looked over them once again, and said, “And your ancestor Abraham was glad to see that my day was coming; and when he saw it come, it filled him with joy!”

“You are not even fifty years old,” shouted the man who had spoken earlier, and you have ‘seen Abraham!’” Everyone laughed, and Jesus, stung, broke into their cacophony with the angry retort, “Amen amen I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM!”

One could hear the intake of breath as the whole crowd reacted in stunned horror. Jesus stood there in front of them for a silent moment, and then cries of “Blasphemy!” “He has blasphemed on the very steps of the Temple!” as people scurried about to find stones to throw at him.

—To throw at no one. He was not there.

THIRTY

They dispersed, thinking to go to the Mount of Olives, but as soon as they left the Temple precincts, there was Jesus, walking among them. Andrew, however, had spotted Judas, leaving by himself, and raced after him.

It was a while before he caught up with him; but finally, he came behind him and, grasping him by the shoulder, spun him around, and said, "I saw what you did with John!"

Suddenly, he found himself face down on the ground, with Judas standing behind him with a foot on his back, and his arm held in such a position that if he moved it toward his head, it would break. "What do you mean, 'what I did with John? It was what John did with me!'"

"Oh, please! I *saw* the two of you!"

"Then your eyes are defective! He came up to me as you did, and challenged me to a fight, spouting some nonsense he got from that slave Ezra that I had put a spider in Nathanael's pouch or something, and then I showed him that I knew a thing or two about fighting. But as I was trying to pin him

down, he decided to pleasure himself against me—I had seen him look at me with lust in his eyes many times—and I was trying to keep him motionless, but I could not.”

“Oh, of a certainty!”

“You may think what you may think, but facts are facts. And no doubt you have seen him look at you thus also.”

“What!”

“Good heavens, Andrew, you *are* blind! What, did you think he admired you?” He laughed. “He admired your shoulders and your arms and your chest—and other parts of your body. Admired you? He *wanted* you, just as he wanted Ezra and me! Wake up!”

What he said went through Andrew like a shock. It had never occurred to him until this moment!

Judas evidently felt his stupefaction, and said, “It does not seem as if you are quite so eager to come to his defense now. No, Andrew, he is not the exemplary, holy young man that you thought he was. In a way, I feel sorry for you, and so I will let you go with just a bit of a warning to think before you try such things with such as I.” and he moved Andrew’s arm to the point where it gave him intense pain, but did not break it, and went away.

Andrew silently rubbed his throbbing arm; it had been bent until the muscles cried out for mercy; but it looked as if no real damage had been done.

To his arm.

Was it possible that what he thought was admiration was simple lust?

How could he face John after this?

Granted, it was *Judas* who said this, and Judas was a liar;

but sometimes liars tell the truth. He had lied about John's arousing himself against him—at least deliberately—because Jesus had said that John had no sin there; but who was to say, if John had the impulses that he had, that he did not look on Andrew with desire?

And Andrew thought it was admiration! But now . . . True, John had made no advances toward him, but then, he seemed not to have made any advances toward Ezra either—and certainly none toward Judas, though Andrew *did* recall an incident or two in which the sight of Judas seemed to affect him. And Judas *was* extremely handsome. He did not realize in what way John was affected until now.

But he was resisting his impulses—and that made him an admirable person.

Perhaps. But not a person he could have as a friend any longer. Any friendly gesture from John would now have the overtone of his giving in—to some extent—to his attraction, and how could Andrew look on that except with loathing? Even if it were involuntary on John's part. Even if he intended to do nothing about it.

Andrew had lost a dear, dear friend, because the dear, dear friend wished he were more than a friend. He did not think he could bear it!

He now realized what it meant to be alone. Here he was, among people who ostensibly cared about him, but he had no one like John; and now he no longer had John. He had no one.

He had Jesus.

But Jesus was hastening to his death! Such a useless, futile death!

He walked dejectedly back into the city, and saw a commotion, with Jesus in the center. He had his hand upon the back of a man who had knelt before him. He said, looking off into the distance, "I have come into the world to separate people. To give sight to the blind, and to blind those who can see." How true! How horribly true!

One or two of the Pharisees who had come out to see what happened to the man said, "You mean, we are blind."

Jesus looked at them. "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of any sin. But when you say you can see, your sins stay fixed within you."

"What happened?" Andrew asked of James the owl.

"The man there, (hem) was blind from birth, and Jesus (ha) gave him his sight. On the (hem, hem) Sabbath. The Pharisees (hem) of course, are not happy about it."

Jesus was now saying something about sheep and shepherds and how his sheep knew his voice, but Andrew was too full of despair to catch more than a word here or there. What *difference* did it all make? What was the point of *anything*?

He heard this, however: "—I am ready to give up my life, and then take it back again. No one is going to take it from me; I am giving it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the power to take it back. This is the command I have from my Father."

Why was he giving it up? *Why* was this his Father's command? Even if he was to take it back again. The whole project of restoring the world was doomed! Why not let it all fall to ruin as it should? As Andrew's whole life had fallen to ruin! What *difference* did it make if he died and then came back

to life? The whole thing was worthless!

“I told you that what I had said was only half the story,” said Jesus, who was beside him as if he had been there all the time.

“Master! Again!” He was filled with chagrin.

“And you remember that I said that the other half involved not mattering to oneself; that I would not have come among you if I mattered to myself, let alone have come among you to die.”

“I cannot understand it!” said Andrew with tears in his eyes. “I understand nothing!”

Jesus laughed. “You know, there is—or there will be—a follower of mine who will be called ‘Doctor Nothing,’ because he will see this so very clearly. This, Andrew, is love: not mattering to oneself, but paying attention to others.”

“If I do not matter to myself, why should *others* matter to me?”

“Because they are. *You* matter to me simply because you are. What have I to gain from you? Or what do I have to lose, if it comes to that? Then why do I care about you? Because you *are*.

“That makes no sense.”

“Yet I *do* care about you. You matter to me. That is love. To have an interest in someone, not for what that person can do for you, or even *to* you, but just because he is, and because he is what he is—whatever he makes of himself. To wish him well if he wishes himself well, and if he wishes to destroy himself, to be happy—yes, be happy!—that he has made himself what he wished to be. But to realize that one would be happier if he made himself happy rather than destroyed himself.”

“It is a paradox, I admit, but the very existence of this world is a paradox. Why would my Father create this universe, if he is infinitely happy without it, and not a jot happier with it? Especially since he made it, in part, free, so that it could try to go against him and against itself—and since it *would* do this. Why would he do it?

“The only answer is that he could do it. Because it is better that the world exist, even in its damaged state, than not. In one sense, it did not matter *to him* what happened in this world, but because he chose that it matter to him, even if he himself gained nothing—because he chose that the world be what *it* chose to be.

“But he knows it could be better, even though the world does not know this. And he wishes to give it this chance, so that at the end, it can *knowingly* be what it chose to be; that it can do what it does with its eyes open, so to speak. I came for them to have life, and to have it to the full—even if they reject it.

“And know this: I will not be thwarted, though sin will be punished. But ultimately, it will be a better world than it would have been without me—and you, and all my followers.

“But as to you, in the world that actually will exist, those who move it in the right direction will have to give up their very selves. I have told you this, several times. You cannot be my follower unless you reject your very self—the self you thought you were—and take up your own cross, and follow me. Because you cannot find your true self unless you reject the false self that you thought you were.

“And you now have accomplished a good part of this. You have lost the self you thought you were—but now you think

you have nothing; that you *are* nothing. But in losing yourself, *and* taking up your own special cross—it is in this agony that you will discover that you are finding yourself—and you will gain not only yourself, but a whole world full of the people you will influence by this sacrifice.

“This is the mystery of love, Andrew, and you, because of your love for me—and John, and perhaps even Judas, if you can ultimately manage it with my help—will be rejoicing with all those you love forever, me and my Father first, and in us all the rest.

“Believe me, it all *does* make sense, even if it seems complete nonsense; you will see. Believe in me and trust. I know it is hard, but the reward will be very great.”

He paused, and Andrew said, in a voice he could barely manage because of his despair, “If you say so, Master.”

“Fear not. I must tell you that the worst has not yet happened, but you will survive; and when I return, you will begin your journey to a delight you cannot even imagine. Trust me.”

“I must. I have no one else to trust.”

“You are learning. But I have others to see to.” And he turned to leave, and said, “Know this: I told John not to be afraid to love anyone, or to hug him, if that was all it was to be.”

What did that mean? Presumably, if John was not to be afraid to love and to hug Andrew, Andrew should not be afraid to love and hug him.

But he could not bring himself to do so.

As he went back to the garden to sleep, he looked around. There was John, the friend he no longer dared to treat as a

friend, who seemed to be in a despair as black as his. He longed to go over and comfort him, but could not manage it; he would think he was awakening a desire in John. How horrible life was!

And then he looked at Matthew, who had just returned from somewhere, looking as if his soul had been shattered; and then Matthew was approached by Thomas, who had an expression on his face that mirrored his, and they talked for a while, before they parted, each shaking his head.

Well, if Jesus wanted his followers to rely on nothing but himself; then he supposed he would kick from under them every prop they had except himself. —All the while telling us that *he* would be gone, leaving us with nothing! Nothing! Except, as he said, that he would be there even when he was no longer there—whatever that might mean.

Like all the rest of them, he settled down to sleep. Or to pretend to sleep.

The next day, they traveled the hour-long walk over to Bethany, where Martha was busy preparing the meal, and Lazarus was not present, having told Martha to inform Jesus that pressing business had kept him in Jerusalem that night. Oh, of a certainty, thought Andrew. Clearly, it was not that he had discovered that his sister was the notorious Mary of Magdala, or there would have been a scene that would make the actors in the amphitheater at Caesarea proud. Most probably, he had begun to suspect that Jesus was becoming too controversial to be an asset, and wished to distance himself from him.

But the interesting thing was that Mary was not to be seen either. She would hardly be expected to be bustling about as

Martha was, but she must be in the house somewhere. Was Mary another one who had all her props knocked from under her? It looked as if every one of the students had begun to realize what “take up your own cross” really meant.

Jesus sat outside the house to wait for the dinner, and Mary’s former slave Judith came out to speak to him briefly, and then said, “I will try,” and ran inside.

Shortly afterward, Mary emerged, blinded by the sun, obviously staggering under her cross, even before her relatives had found out who she really was. Something else had happened in Bethany.

Finally, she noticed Jesus and sat down on the bench beside him, looking at the ground. Jesus began speaking to her, and at first she said not a word, and then made a few laconic replies, in a tone of complete and utter despair.

Suddenly, Martha came out and said, in a voice clearly meant to be overheard by everyone, “Master, does it not concern you that my sister has left me alone to take care of waiting upon you?”

“Martha, Martha,” said Jesus. “So much is important to you, and you have so much on your mind. But there is only one thing that matters. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her.” —Yet, from her demeanor, it certainly appeared as if Mary had chosen the worst of all possible parts.

Martha looked indignantly at the two of them, and marched back into the house, muttering (also for all to hear) that unless someone took the worse part, those who chose the better part would do so on empty stomachs. Jesus laughed, and resumed his conversation.

Mary then began to be more and more earnest, and finally she cried, “Stop! Stop!” and covered her ears.

“Mary, Mary,” said Jesus audibly, “you worry too much.”

“Master,” she pleaded, “listen to me! I am no one, I am dirt, but listen to me! If you say such things in public, they will kill you!”

“I know. It does not matter.”

“It matters to *me*!” she almost shouted.

Jesus’s voice dropped, and no one could make out what he said. It mattered to everyone.

Mary said again in a loud voice, “I do not *want* to be chosen!”

To think that once—back what seemed decades ago—Andrew actually wanted to be chosen! But now that he was experiencing it, he would prefer to have been killed!

But not on a cross! Even with Jesus! Dear God! I cannot bear it!

But Mary survived this conversation, it seemed, and so did all the rest; because one continues to breathe, one bears what one cannot bear. They returned to Galilee after that. Jesus had apparently accomplished whatever it was he wanted in Judea, including saving Mary from suicide, or whatever she was contemplating. It seemed that everyone was on the brink of suicide, especially poor Thomas. Andrew had heard from Simon that Thomas’s father had to be fired from the fishing business because *he*, of all people, was too drunk to be anything but a severe hindrance to it. Poor Malachi! Too drunk! But what can one do?”

Shortly after that, Ezra came to John, and gave him an embarrassed bow. John went over and hugged him—briefly

—to show that he was his fond friend, even if it was to be merely a friend. “I understand you have been with Thomas,” he said.

Ezra sighed. “Yes. Poor Thomas. His father—” he did not know how to finish the sentence.

“My father told me. How terribly, terribly sad.”

“Well, it is not quite thus. You see, Thomas went and removed the curse from him—”

“He did! So he is cured?”

“Well, it was not quite so simple. You see, when he awoke, sober, and saw Thomas, he drove him away and essentially cursed him.”

“How horrible!”

“And there was every probability that he would go right back to drinking himself into insensibility—he was almost at the state Thomas was—when I—you see, he knew me and was a friend of mine, and—and, well, I asked him if he intended to continue imitating Thomas.”

“No!”

“It was the only thing that had a chance of working. I had to do it! And it *did* work! He swore that from that moment, the would drink nothing but water!”

“How—how dreadful! That he would do this out of hatred for his son!”

“Thomas is devastated. But he *says*, at least, that he is grateful that his father is sober. And also I saw Zebedee, and he is willing to take him back.”

“Well, at least there is *some* good that came of it. And perhaps Thomas will some day be reconciled to his father.”

“Jesus told him to pay attention to what happens to Lazarus, whatever that means.”

“What does *Lazarus* have to do with it?”

“I have no idea. Except, of course, that he does not yet know that Mary Magdalene is his sister. It must be something connected with what happens when he finds out.”

“I see. To keep the sky from falling then will be the miracle of miracles. If *that* can be reconciled, then anything can happen!”

“—By the way, there is one thing I have been wanting to tell you, but I have been too busy with Thomas.”

“What is that?”

“You see, I happened to see from a distance the fight you had with Judas.” Andrew wondered where he was. So there were *two* observers of that fight.

John closed his eyes in pain.

“You need not feel ashamed. It was obvious that Judas had studied fighting, and you simply fought when you were younger. My first owner not only trained us in giving pleasure, but he knew that we would be attacked, and so he trained us to fight also. I know what Judas did, you see.” So that was why Judas had bested me, thought Andrew.

“Well, at least that part of it was not something I am to blame for, then, I suppose.”

“Not at all. Not any of it. But it was another thing that Judas did that infuriated me. And also, just before we came here to Galilee, he met Thomas, and slashed that wineskin he kept under his tunic, and ruined it, spilling everything on the ground.”

“My God! He did not!”

“He did indeed. But—you remember that episode of the woman caught in adultery?”

“How well I remember it!”

“Well, Bartholomew and I had resolved to kill Judas, and Jesus wrote, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ and looked straight at us.”

“He knew. He would.”

“How could we have thought he would not?”

“So for some incredible reason, he does not want him killed.”

“I know. I cannot understand it. But what could I do? But this was all too much! And shortly after the incident of the wineskin, I met Judas alone, and grabbed the front of his tunic, resolved that he would pay! And he said, ‘What? First the little boy and now the man of coal? You wish to fight? Very well, strip, and I will teach you a lesson also!’

“We threw off our mantles and tunics, and squared off at each other. He tried the same maneuver he had with you, and I was ready for it—but I had had rather more experience than he, and it was not long before I was standing behind him, holding his arm in such a way that if I moved it up a bit, it would break.

Just as Judas held mine, thought Andrew.

“He knew enough to realize this, and so there we were: he in front of me, and I behind him. And then—well, let me say that I introduced myself where I was not welcome. Do you follow me?”

John, who understood too well, looked at him with horror. As did Andrew, from his vantage-point.

“Now what I did *can* be a very enjoyable experience, if one knows how to receive someone thus, if I may so put it; but he apparently had no education in this sort of thing, and in that case, it is apt to be rather painful—very painful, if his—guest

—is as large as I am.

“He screamed, and so I moved myself about to see if I could find a position he found more comfortable. But everything I did only seemed to make matters worse. Well, this went on for a considerable time—I have a good deal of self-restraint, and, in spite of the fact that *I* was enjoying myself a great deal, I wished to prolong the experience as much as possible.”

Andrew almost laughed aloud. John had his hand over his mouth in shock. Ezra gave him an amused look, and continued, “After a short time, I let his arm go, because he was beginning to collapse before me, begging me to stop—it was music to my ears—and I had to hold up his hips so that we could stay together. But eventually I grew rather tired; it is hard work, when all is said and done, and so finally, to let him know that I no longer had what you might call any hard feelings toward him, I left a little present inside him—actually, a rather large present—and let him fall groaning to the ground.

Andrew could not help it; the revenge was too sweet. He rejoiced that he had overheard this—and then reproached himself for rejoicing. But still . . .

He turned away and heard no more. It was too delicious; something to savor on this day of horrors.

THIRTY-ONE

SHORTLY AFTERWARD, DURING the winter, as the Feast of Dedication approached, Jesus said that it was time to return to Jerusalem. Andrew was nervous about this, because it seemed as if the crisis was practically upon them. After all, it had to come some time.

And as soon as Jesus set foot on Solomon's Porch, the Judeans crowded round, and said, "How long are you going to leave us in suspense? If you *are* the Prince, come out and say it!"

"I *have* told you," said Jesus, "but you do not believe me. And the deeds my Father has sent me to perform give proof of it; but you will not believe them either—because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice, and I know who they are. And they follow me, and I will give them eternal life, and they will never be lost and no one will take them out of my hands."

Andrew remembered his claim the last time they had been in Jerusalem that those who believed in him would never die. He supposed that this was possible, but "will I really not die?"

Ever?” Andrew asked himself aloud. How hard it was to believe that!

But presumably it would not happen unless he were accepted as King. And he would not be accepted as King if people did not believe that by accepting him they would never die or be sick, and lions would lie down with lambs and all the rest of it. Who could believe it?

Did he glance at Judas? “My Father, who gave them to me is greater than anyone, and no one can take anything from his hands—and the Father and I are one and the same thing!”

There! He had finally said it! There was no way to misinterpret it now! So he called himself the “Son of Man” because he *was* God emptying himself somehow into human skin. “Blasphemy!” came the shouts. They picked up stones once again.

But this time, instead of vanishing, Jesus held up his hand and said, “I showed you many good deeds from my Father. For which of them are you going to stone me?”

“We are stoning you for blasphemy, not any good deeds!” was the answer. “You are a man, and you are claiming to be God!” They have it backwards, thought John. He is God, who has emptied himself into humanity, somehow.

Jesus looked at them, made his left hand into the shape of an open book, and pointed at it. “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said you are gods?’ Now if Scripture calls ‘gods’ those through whom the words of God were uttered, and if you cannot deny that Scripture says this, why do you say that I am blaspheming when I say I am the Son of God, if I am the one the Father consecrated and sent into the world? Do not believe me if I do not do deeds that can only be done by my Father;

but if I do do them, then if you do not believe me, believe the deeds, so that you will recognize and know that I am in the Father and the Father is in me!”

They screamed and rushed upon him to seize him—and grasped nothing but air. “How does he *do* that?” one said. “Perhaps he is what he says he is,” answered another, awestruck. “Nonsense!” was the angry reply. “He is a madman, who knows a few tricks!”

Andrew could not fathom what “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” could mean. How could something that is inside one be what one was inside? Of course, if they were one and the same thing, there is a sense that that could be true, he supposed.

It turned out that Jesus, who once again appeared among the students as if nothing had happened, now decided to go across the Jordan into Peraea, outside of Judea, where John had once bathed the people. Jesus evidently realized the danger from the Judeans, and was going outside their territory. The people there had heard of him, and were willing to accept him.

The students did not know what Jesus intended. Perhaps he was content to work among these foreigners up until the Passover, where he would create the final confrontation with the Judean authorities.

“I think that is what it will be,” said Andrew. “The city will be full of Galileans, and the Judeans from this territory, who are well-disposed toward him.”

“And then what?” asked Nathanael.

“Well, what *I* think is that he is counting on having this large crowd to overcome the resistance of the Judean

authorities to making him King.”

“I am inclined to believe that you are right,” said Nathanael. “I cannot see how he can come any closer to the crisis without actually being in the middle of it. Probably the Passover will decide things one way or another.”

“God grant it is the right way!” said Matthew.

“God grant. But he himself does not seem sanguine about it.”

“But he told me once that it *could* happen. Unfortunately, he added that it would not.”

“Well, if it could, it can,” said Andrew. “We must not lose hope.”

“None of us has,” said Nathanael. Andrew, in spite of his words, thought that this was not quite true. He himself had no real hope that Jesus would not be killed; Jesus had said in so many words that he *would* be killed. No, the dream of the transformation of the world—and of people like Andrew’s never dying—was just that: a dream. It would not happen.

Jesus startled them all shortly afterward, by saying, “We must return to Judea. Make ready.”

“Rabbi,” said the Rock, “The Judeans are trying to stone you now. Are you going back *there*?”

“Are there not twelve hours in a day?” answered Jesus. “If a man travels during the day, he does not stumble, because he can see this world’s light. If he travels at night, he might fall, because then there is no light in him.” He looked out across the Jordan to the gray, barren hills beyond which lay Bethany and Jerusalem. “Our friend Lazarus is resting,” he said. “We must go and awaken him.”

Lazarus? Was this . . . ?

“Master, if he is resting, he will get better,” said Andrew. Word had reached the group a few days previously that Lazarus was ill.

“Lazarus,” said Jesus, looking solemnly around at them, “is dead.” There was a shocked intake of breath. “I am glad of it for your sake, so that you will believe in me, because I was not there. Now. Let us go to him.” What? Was he going to bring Lazarus back to life after three days—it would take them almost that long to get there—as a kind of rehearsal, so to speak, of his own return to life? To prepare us not to be overwhelmed when he died?

There was a silence. Everyone knew the implications. Perhaps this was to be the crisis, not the Passover.

Finally Thomas said, “We might as well go—and die with him.” Well, if they had to, they had to. What did they have to live for now, in any case?

As they were on the way, word came that Lazarus was indeed dead, and that by the time they reached Bethany, he would be in the tomb four days.

Jesus stopped just outside the town in a secluded place and sent word by David that he had arrived. Ezra came up and stood between Thomas and John. He put a hand on each of their shoulders. Andrew almost envied Ezra. He still could not have brought himself to do that. “Some day, perhaps,” he said softly to himself.

Shortly afterward Martha came out. “Master,” she said, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died!—And yet,” she went on, “even now I know that God will give you anything you ask him.” It was not an act of faith so much as it was a plea, and she dared not even voice what she was

hoping. It was too fantastic. Four days! This was no David, being led out on the stretcher to be buried..

“Your brother will return to life,” said Jesus.

Martha hedged. “Well, I know that he will return to life at the resurrection on the last day, when everyone returns to life. But—” Her voice trailed into silence. Everyone knew what she meant.

“I am resurrection,” said Jesus, “and I am life. Anyone who believes in me will be alive even if he is dead. And anyone who is alive and believes in me will not die ever.” He looked fixedly at her. “Do you believe this?” There it was again. Never dying. Did Andrew believe? Almost.

Again, Martha hedged. “Yes, Master,” she said, “I have always believed that you are the Prince, the Son of God who has come into the world.” She did not say that she believed that she would never die, however, or that Lazarus was alive, though dead, whatever that might mean.

Jesus inquired about Mary, and Martha rushed away to fetch her. Where *was* Mary? Had Lazarus died somehow because he found out about who she was? Good Lord, had he killed himself?

They waited for a while in silence, each evidently thinking about what all of this might signify, and finally Mary came up, followed by a small group of Judeans, who had come to the house to console the sisters.

She rushed up to Jesus and fell at his feet, wailing, “Master, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!” It was almost a reproach. Jesus waited, clearly wanting to see if, as in Martha’s case, there followed any hint of a glimmer of hope in him. But nothing was heard but her

weeping.

Jesus finally gave up. He heaved a great sigh of resignation, and said, “All right, where did you bury him?”

“Come and see, Master.” they said, and as they were going over to the tomb, he looked at Mary, who was a bit in front of him, shook his head, and wept.

“See how he loved him,” said some. But that was not it. He wept for how little trust Mary and everyone else had in him. Andrew whispered, “Master, I believe—I think. Help my unbelief!”

They came up to the tomb, which was a cave with a large stone over the entrance. Jesus heaved another sigh, as he looked in John’s direction, and said, “Take away the stone.”

At this, Martha came up beside him and whispered, “Master, he is already decaying. He has been there four days!” Martha did not believe.

Jesus whirled around to face her and snapped, “Did I not tell you that *if* you believed, you would see how great God is?”

Martha, stung by the rebuke, fell back—and then looked over at a couple of the men, and nodded. They went up to the stone, and with great effort, rolled it away.

Jesus then looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for listening to me. I know, you always listen to me. I am saying this because of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me.” And then he looked into the tomb, held his hand out in front of him, and shouted in a voice which made the hills echo, and which was loud enough to reach deep into the pit of the abyss, “Lazarus! Come out to me!”

And the dead man, bound hand and foot in linen, and with his face covered with a cloth, hobbled out. Of course he

did.

“Untie him,” said Jesus matter-of-factly, “and let him go.”

For a few moments, everyone stood paralyzed; it seemed as if it was the corpse of Lazarus walking, and no one dared go near and touch him. Then, from under the face cloth came a muffled cry of “Help me!” and two or three of the men rushed over and with trembling hands undid the straps that held it round his neck.

The shroud, upon which he had been laid and which was doubled over to cover the front of his body, was still covering his face; and the men pulled it aside so that he could see. He was at first blinded by the brilliant sunlight, but as his eyes accustomed themselves while the men were unwrapping his body, he kept blinking and opening and closing his mouth like a fish, saying, “What? . . . What? . . . What? . . .”

Martha, laughing and crying at once, ran up to him and embraced him, saying, “Oh, Lazarus! You are back! I knew it! Thank God! Thank God!”

“Back? . . . Back?” he said.

“Stop that!” cried Judith to the men who were unwinding him, upon whom Martha had almost trampled. “Do you want to undress him here in public? Find a robe for him first!”

“Here, take my cloak,” said one of the men. “We must get you back home and wash those spices off.”

“Spices?—Thank you, Ebenezer,” said Lazarus, bewildered. “But what are you doing here? And where am I? This looks like my father’s grave. And what is it doing open thus?” —And then he looked down at the wrappings, and the expression on his face was so dumbfounded that everyone burst out in laughter.

He flushed and looked angrily around. “Is this a joke? I know not what you have done to me, but I do not find it at all amusing!”

Everyone immediately lapsed into an embarrassed silence. Martha said, “Do not be angry Lazarus. Everyone is merely so happy to see you alive!”

“Alive? Why should I not be alive?”

Ebenezer looked at him as he put the cloak on and let the shroud fall to his feet. “Do you remember nothing of the past few days?”

Lazarus, startled, turned to look him full in the face. Then he stared off into the distance, as if making an effort to recall—and then looked over at Martha, and then Mary, and afterwards Judith, with an expression of intense pain. He closed his eyes in anguish, and then reopened them and once again looked at the landscape. “I remember that I was in Zebediah’s house,” he said musingly, “and I believe I did not feel well. I fell asleep, and it seems as if I dreamed a fantastic dream—but I cannot recall now what it was. It was something about . . . no, it is gone. And then I thought I heard the Master call me, and I was lying down in the dark, tied up. I struggled to my feet and tried to walk—and . . . then you were here, and—I do not understand it.”

Everyone was silent. Finally, Ebenezer said quietly, “I think we had best get you home.”

During this time, Jesus, who was standing beside Mary, with Matthew on his other side, whispered in her ear, “I think I will return now; it is dangerous for me to be here—even more dangerous because of this. I do not wish anyone to notice me.”

She looked at him, tears filling her eyes, and reached out to touch him. “Thank you, Master! Oh, thank you so very much!” she whispered.

In a mock-serious tone, he replied, “You two have given me more trouble than any dozen others! But know this: I will not have conditions put upon faith in me. Now see to your brother.” And he nodded to the other students and they began to return to where they had been.

It certainly showed the Judeans who were with Martha and Mary that he really had to be what he claimed to be. How could God not be confirming his claim, if he had brought a decaying corpse back to life? After four days in the grave, when “he was already decaying.”

Of course, thought Andrew, Lazarus was his friend. Who was to say that he had actually died, and was not there in the tomb, waiting for Jesus to call him out? Andrew did not believe this for an instant, but he could see that the Judeans would think in this way. It was proof, but only for those who were disposed to believe.

And possibly those who had been there. If it were not as it seemed, then Lazarus and Martha and Mary were actors of consummate skill. Andrew was sure that the Judean observers would take it for what it really was. But could they convince anyone else?

It would certainly be reported. There was no doubt it would be. The Judeans would now have to confront a man who claimed to be God, and who called upon his Father, who “always listened” to him, and brought back to life a man who was “already decaying.”

Jesus and the group hastened to leave; but this time, they

did not go back across the Jordan, but instead went north of Jerusalem into the deserted country around Ephraim. Of course no one saw them; Jesus evidently had the power to move unobserved when he wished.

The Passover, Andrew reflected, was only a month or so away, and it was likely that Jesus wished to be more available to enter Jerusalem during the feast. Apparently, he also had the idea that the Judeans—and everyone else—had all the evidence needed. The claim was clear: he was “I AM,” one and the same as the Father, but somehow his Son, as well as being the Son of Man. If they wished to accept him as King, and in so doing never die and presumably never suffer, then they now knew what the terms were. They could not accept *him* as King without simultaneously accepting *God* as King. Would they be up to such a leap of faith?

And if not? That was the great question.

THIRTY-TWO

Once in the deserted land around Ephraim, there was nothing really to do but wait. It was clear that Jesus did not intend to move back into populated Judea before the Passover, and so the time was spent in speculation—and, it must be admitted, fear bordering on panic. Everyone was trying desperately to steel himself to face the worst.

John, for some reason, left them for a day, and returned half-elated and half-depressed. It seemed that he had gone to see Annas, to find out, if possible, what designs the authorities had on Jesus, and his fears had been confirmed. What the source of the underlying elation was, no one knew.

In any case, he had barely returned to the group, when Judith came running up, panting, “Master! Master!” Jesus came over, and she gasped, “Martha told me to tell you to co—come at once! She said that raising Lazarus was noth—nothing in comparison with this!”

What was this? Something *more* with Lazarus? Perhaps this was what Jesus had been referring to with Thomas.

Jesus put his hands on her shoulders as she tried desperately to breathe, and said in a calm voice, "I understand what is the matter. Be not distressed. You may tell them that my time has arrived, and that I will come to dinner there in two days, and that you should invite some friends of Lazarus, as you had planned. And you must assure them that there is no cause for concern."

"I do not understand. Invite? Planned?"

"They will know."

Judas, who had been listening as soon as he caught sight of Judith, said, "Are we all to accompany you, Master?" He seemed a bit nervous.

"The Twelve, I should think," said Jesus. They could not suffer an invasion of all of us." He looked over at Chusa's Joanna as he said this, and she reddened and fled when he caught her eye. So it had to have been she who had told Lazarus about Mary, and which doubtless had led somehow to his death. Evidently, his return to life was not something he rejoiced over. Andrew suspected as much when he saw Lazarus at the grave, obviously much more concerned with how he appeared than that he had been returned to life. He probably thought it a fate worse than death. So Jesus must have a new miracle in mind, one that could somehow convert Lazarus into a man of at least some sense.

Jesus said to Judith, "Tell them to be ready in two days. It is little enough time for them to prepare, but if I know Martha, it will suffice; and I think it not prudent to delay longer. Now go when you have caught your breath; they will be wanting news as soon as possible."

Judith did not wait, but ran off before she had fully

recovered. David looked after her with a mixture of desire and contempt—what was *that* all about?—and then looked, his eyes narrowed, over at Judas—and what was *that* about? Things were going on that Andrew had no inkling of.

Ezra and Thomas met, and had a long, but obviously private, conversation. It had something to do with Judas, it seemed, since they looked surreptitiously at him, and Thomas reacted with extreme shock at one point. Something drastic had happened.

At any rate, shortly afterward, Jesus and the Twelve set off for Bethany, and for some reason did not collect a crowd as they traveled. Perhaps the people were busying themselves with preparing for the Passover, which was to take place in six days. Or perhaps, once again, when Jesus did not want to be accompanied, no one somehow noticed him and his followers.

As they arrived, a number of people from Jerusalem were already there, friends of Lazarus, talking with him and pointedly avoiding mention of the event that had happened, but simply making small talk, which Lazarus took almost no part in, merely giving one-word answers when he had to speak. He was obviously in the depths of despair—a fact which was as manifest and as ignored by everyone as his death and return to life—and was finding it a supreme effort behave with even minimal politeness. Fortunately, the people surrounding him were of the upper class in Jerusalem, and, given Lazarus' personality, he could not insult them by ignoring them or appearing too morose.

Martha, who was in the room, was looking with concern and pride at his effort. Mary, as usual, was not visible.

As soon as everyone saw the Twelve and Jesus, the

atmosphere, if possible, grew even more tense. Though Martha and Zebediah (the name of the older man that had been at the tomb with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus) had made careful selection among the guests from Jerusalem to be certain that there was no one who would immediately rush out and denounce Jesus on sight, it was still common knowledge that his whereabouts was to be reported to the authorities as soon as he set foot in Judean territory, and there was always a danger that someone might do something untoward. But no one made a move. Martha had been most judicious.

Lazarus greeted Jesus politely—what else could he do?—but since Jesus was not high society, he looked at him with a loathing that made his position on resurrection perfectly clear, and nodded perfunctorily to the twelve Emissaries (to whom he had always paid scant attention in any case), and then turned back to one of his banking companions from the city, evidently resolved to act as if Jesus were not there, and letting Martha, who was responsible for this debacle, make the best of it she could. Martha's attitude indicated that what she wanted was for the Emissaries to be present for some reason, and she evidently had those from Jerusalem in order to prevent Lazarus from rushing away as he might well have done in other circumstances.

Fortunately, neither Jesus nor—what was more perilous—any of his Emissaries started any controversial conversation; and the others put a face on things whenever it was necessary for any in the two groups to mingle, which they did as little and as briefly as possible. There was a certain bemusement on both sides that the two groups would have been invited together; both thought it was a social blunder on

Mary's part, who presumably had wanted to unite those who had come to the tomb with Lazarus' savior, not realizing that what had happened at the tomb was as forbidden as mentioning the name of the One who had effected the deed.

Mary had come in, rather shyly, around this time, and helped Martha to place the guests on the dining-couches, with those from Jerusalem lying at all the high places around the outside of the U of the table (the serving was done from inside)—to the left and right of Lazarus, who would, of course, as the master of the house, be at the center of the curve. Jesus and the Twelve were located in the lowest places at the table, but given what Jesus had taught about such things, they were not in much of a position to complain.

At least Jesus was lying at the arm of the table in front of Lazarus (though it meant that he had to tip his head to look at him); it would have been a distinct insult if Lazarus had not been facing in his direction. Andrew was in a fairly good position to see what was going on at the head of the table.

Martha and Judith with the servants served the dinner; and again Mary absented herself. Matthew had tried to catch her eye earlier, but she had been very preoccupied with something-or-other, and left as soon as she decently could.

Martha had just taken in some dish to serve, when Mary, with a look of anguish and sorrow, rushed into the room, looked about as if distraught, and said, "Master! Forgive me!" and rushed to his feet, which, like everyone's, were hanging over the outside edge of the dining-couch on which he was lying. She broke the neck of a bottle of nard and poured it over them, kneeling and wiping them with her hair. At first, she made weeping noises, and then the tears became all too real.

Everyone, Matthew especially, was paralyzed with shock. This was a reenactment, for some reason, of what they all knew had happened at the house of Simon the Pharisee in Magdala.

The scent of the perfume filled the whole room, as it must have done in Magdala, and there was total, stunned silence, except for her weeping, as he had been told there had been then. Andrew was completely nonplused. What had she done to provoke this—this farce?

“Why this waste?” came a scornful voice, shattering the stillness. It was Judas.

Mary froze and now there was not a sound at all. “Why was this perfume not sold?” he went on. “It would have brought three hundred denarii, and we could have given the money to the poor.”

Jesus looked over at him, with a momentary flash of disdain, swiftly overcome. Then he said, in a gentle voice, “Let her alone. Why are you pestering her? She has done a me a great kindness.” He looked down at her. “She is preparing me for my burial. You always have the poor with you; you will not always have me.” Then he looked around the room. “Amen I tell you, whenever the good news about me is reported in the whole world, what she has done this day will be told in memory of her.”

As he was speaking, there was a sudden stirring. Mary looked up, and everyone’s eyes focused on Lazarus, his face ashen, rising from the table and rushing out of the room. Mary leaped up and ran after him. In the room, people began getting up and there was general consternation.

There was a movement to try to follow him, and then people began to think better of it, and a few blocked the door.

And then, from the other room, suddenly there were women's screams and sounds of fighting, which went on for a considerable time. It sounded as if Judith had attacked Mary, of all things, and then Martha had joined in.

After what seemed an hour, but was probably only a few minutes, Lazarus' voice rose above the tumult. "Judith! Judith! Judith! Stop! Stop!"

Immediately, everything ceased. There was a dead silence both in the room where the fighting had been going on and in the dining room.

Lazarus' voice came again, too soft for words to be audible, and then there was the sound of Judith sobbing and muffled words, as if she were speaking into cloth.

After another, rather briefer silence, Lazarus spoke again and she answered, more distinctly now but still too faint to for anyone to understand what was being said. Lazarus said something else, rather more at length, and then she replied, with something that sounded like, "Dear *dear* Lazarus, I did not dare!"

Judith? "Dear Lazarus?" Good heavens! Judith was in *love* with Lazarus! Of all people! But—miracle of miracles!—Lazarus seemed to reciprocate it, from the little they could hear. It certainly sounded like it. Incredible! It had taken this to bring Lazarus to his senses, and Jesus had done it! He had done it! He could indeed do anything!

—Well, at least somewhat *more* to his senses than he had been. To make Lazarus a rational individual would be to create a completely different person. And, to be sure, the Lazarus who emerged after a short interval *was* in some sense an entirely different person either from the one who had entered that

room of mayhem or the one they had seen earlier in the day. But he was still recognizably Lazarus. He was secretly elated about something—obviously about loving Judith, and being loved by her! Incredible!—and announced to all that he was sorry to have disturbed the party, but that there had been a slight accident that he had been able to take care of (*That* will be the day! thought Andrew), and now everything would be all right; that no one was really hurt, but that it was better, all things considered, for the women to remain in seclusion (probably a masterpiece of understatement) for the rest of the day—and, in short, he begged their pardon for suggesting that it might be well to put an end to the festivities.

They all pronounced that they understood perfectly, though but a few of them had anything like a suspicion of the truth—if it *was* the truth. What bewildered most of them was the contrast to what he had been just moments before. All, including Jesus and his Emissaries, left with a minimum of fuss, a few of the banking friends asking Lazarus when they would see him in Jerusalem, to which he replied, “Soon. Soon. Very soon, in fact.” They seemed gratified with his response.

They went back to the camp at Ephraim, where Ezra came over, all eagerness to find out what happened. When Thomas told him, he laughed a great laugh, and said, “He certainly has a wonderful sense of humor, has he not, in addition to all his other qualities! Thomas, there is hope for you yet! There is hope for both of us!”

Andrew wondered how much hope there was for the rest of them, if Jesus was going to be killed—and soon. Granted, the drama of Lazarus had reached its ridiculous *dénouement*, but that was just comic relief in the terrible tragedy of the history

of the world.

Jesus informed the Emissaries, after a day in their camp near Ephraim, that on the morrow they would be entering Jerusalem, in preparation for the Passover.

Everyone realized that the confrontation was now about to occur, and hoped that there were enough Galileans and supporters of Jesus to tip the scales in his favor. But Jesus was sure to reiterate the claim that he was God when they tried to make him King by acclamation, and say that the Reign of God would come in his person; and it was anyone's guess what would happen then. The slightest thing could turn everyone against him, and with a crowd such as was bound to be there, when that happened, stoning would be the most benign of all outcomes.

All began well—too well, in fact, to last. When they reached the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent a couple of people ahead, telling them to untie a young donkey with its dam, and bring them to him. They returned saying that the owners were Josiah and Amos, who recognized them, and were glad to lend them.

Jesus then mounted the donkey colt, and rode on it toward Jerusalem. When the people saw him, a huge crowd formed. Someone cut down a branch from a palm tree and waved it, shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and soon almost everyone joined in, crying that Jesus was the King of Israel, and "Blessed is the one coming in the Master's name!" and strewing either palm branches or their own cloaks on the road in front of Jesus. The roar became deafening.

"Rabbi," shouted a Pharisee who came up, "curb your followers!" and Jesus answered, "Amen I tell you, if they were

to be silent, the very stones would shout!” All this was at the top of their lungs, to be heard over the crowd.

When they arrived at the Temple, things calmed down somewhat. The Pharisees and Sadducees were there, with difficulties that they hoped would discredit Jesus; but he calmly answered them all, in such a way that they were the ones who looked foolish, not he.

The Passover, of course, and its preparation were always confusing, with the narrow streets of Jerusalem crammed with people, donkeys, oxen, some horses, the soldiers trying to keep order, vendors of lambs shouting their wares, since every family had to have one for the feast on, as it appeared, the day before the Sabbath. There seemed to be a difference of opinion as to when the moon would actually be full, which was the beginning of the festivities.

But all this was compounded by the disputes that Jesus was having with his interrogators, and the shouting-matches that went on in the audience between those who held that Jesus had been totally vanquished by his accusers and those who were convinced that Jesus had demolished them. It was impossible actually to listen to anything.

The tumult went on for several days, with Jesus leaving at sundown for the Mount of Olives and the Gethsemani Garden, which, surprisingly enough, the authorities had not found out about. True, the group was quite circumspect in going there. Jesus had seen to it that they did not go in a body, but severally, by separate routes; and since Jesus himself never seemed to be in any one of the smaller groups, the people did not know whom to follow. Typical, thought Andrew. If Jesus wanted to escape this whole mess, he could simply do what he

was doing, and no one but those he wanted would be able to see that he was there. But he was doing this only during the time they were to go and sleep; he showed no sign of disappearing now when the controversies became heated. And he was certainly alienating those in positions of power.

The people were all, it seemed on his side, but what did that matter? Crowds could be turned completely around in an eyeblink, if the right move was made. And Andrew was convinced that somehow, the Pharisees would show him in a ridiculous or disgraceful light, and it would be all over.

They could not do it by words, however. They tried; they had their best minds on it, but they were engaged in verbal fencing with the Wisdom of God, and they were insects to be stepped on by it. If anyone looked ridiculous, they did. Jesus once asked them, for instance, how he could be the son of David, if David called him, "My Master," and quoted the psalm, "The Master said to my master, 'sit at my right hand while I make your enemies your footstool.'"

But, unless Jesus made himself invisible at night when they could capture him, this could not last. Probably what he was doing here was to show everyone who cared to listen that he had reason, and his opponents nothing but irrational envy; that if he were captured, it would be one of the most unjust acts ever perpetrated in this world.

But it would happen. Andrew was convinced of it. And even Jesus, every night when he showed up at the garden of Gethsemani, was anything but ebullient, though he had won numbers of verbal battles during the day, and the crowd was more and more inclined to pronounce him King then and there. He knew better—and so did Andrew. The others were

much more optimistic, but it was all futile, Andrew was convinced.

THIRTY-THREE

Then one day, some people who spoke Greek approached Philip (who, it turned out, by this time also spoke Greek fairly well) and asked if they could see Jesus. Philip, who did not feel up to doing anything on his own, sought out Andrew, who looked at him with some contempt, but then went with him to Jesus and told him who wished to speak to him.

Instead of answering, Jesus drew in his breath. “The time has come for the Son of Man to show what he really is!” he said, looking at the people who had come behind them, and beyond them to the blue sky. Then he looked round at those of the Twelve who were near him, and said, “Amen amen I tell you, if a grain of wheat does not fall to the ground and die, it remains alone; but if it dies, it multiplies itself many times over.” He was on a step, and looked down at his students, loving them. “Anyone who cares about his life,” he said, “will lose it, and anyone who hates his life in this world will save it for eternal life! And if anyone wants to be my slave, he is to follow me, so that my slave will be where I am; and then my

Father will show respect for anyone who follows me.”

It was a signal of some sort from the Father, the kind Jesus would ordinarily be stroking his beard from. But he had been waiting for this—or something like it—but the fact was that when he saw it, he knew that it was the end.

And he closed his eyes, as if in pain and anguish, and shook his head back and forth. “But now my soul is in turmoil. And what should I say? ‘Father, rescue me from this moment?’—But I came just for this moment! Father, show how great your name is!” Like everyone else, he could not bear it!

And then the thunder spoke once again as it did before, when John bathed Jesus: “I have shown it, and I will show it again!”

“Did you hear that?” said some. “The thunder?” said others. “No, it was words!” “An angel was speaking to him!”

“That voice,” said Jesus, “did not speak for my sake; it spoke for yours. The present moment is the crisis of the world! Now is the time when the ruler of this world will be driven into exile! And if I am lifted up off the ground”—and he held out his arms. The cross! For some reason this guaranteed that the end would be the cross!—“I will draw everyone to myself!”

“Wait! Wait! Wait!” shouted the people. There were confused cries of, “We heard that the Prince will stay with us forever!” “How is it that you say this Son of Man is to be lifted up somewhere?” “Just who *is* this ‘Son of Man?’”

“The light is with you for only a little while,” said Jesus when he could be heard over the tumult. “Do your traveling while you have light, and do not let the darkness overtake you; people who travel in darkness do not know where they are going! And while you have the light, believe in the light, so

that you will be children of light!”

Immediately the crowd broke into another uproar. Some were defending Jesus, and others kept saying, “Whenever we ask something sensible, he gives us poetry!”

Jesus slipped away in the confusion, and went back to Gethsemani. His disappearance was a signal for the students also to leave and meet him there.

Andrew dragged himself in his group to the garden. He had apparently given the people all the chance that they would be able to accept; any turning against him now would be a turning against themselves and against the whole world, and they would, at least to some extent, realize it. At the very least, they knew that Jesus was innocent; but with any further thought, they would know that he *was* God. It was something that they could not avoid, if they had their eyes open.

Even Judas. How could Judas not know? He had to be one of those who through closed eyes screamed, “I see! I see!” Unless these last days had effected a conversion. But then Andrew thought of Lazarus, and Judas’s contemptuous remark to Mary about the waste of money that anointing Jesus represented. And Jesus’s reproach seemed to make no difference to him—no difference at all.

No, it was all hopeless. Hopeless! It was going to happen, and Jesus knew it!

On this afternoon, the day before what most were saying was the Eve of the Passover, some of the students asked Jesus where he wanted them to go to make the Passover dinner ready. Judas was among them. But Jesus singled out two others, and said to them, “Go into the city and you will meet a man there whom you will recognize. Tell him that I ask him

if he knows a place where I can eat the Passover dinner with my students. He will show you a room, and you can make it ready. Today.” The two students were a bit nonplused at this, but assumed that it was because of the danger they were all in.

Another brilliant move. The authorities were probably waiting until Jesus was going to the Passover dinner, or just before sundown, so that they would not “defile themselves” with the “work” of murdering their God. But Jesus was going to eat the Passover on the day earlier, which some held was the correct date. He would be gone by the time they came to capture him. And he sent the students in such a way that Judas could not know where he was going to eat it.

Another chance. If no one betrayed him, he would eat the Passover in peace, and then not be there when the authorities were looking for him. Which meant, Andrew concluded, that someone—one of *them*—would betray him! And Andrew knew who it would be!

And Jesus had not wanted him killed! When he already so richly deserved to die! But he wanted even Judas to be given the chance not to betray him—even though he knew that he would not avail himself of the chance! No, the betrayal would be prevented, if at all, by Judas’s free choice. The fate of the world hung upon the free choice of that—that depraved mind!

In any case, that evening, Jesus led them to the house in Jerusalem, telling them at the last minute that they would be eating the Passover dinner that night, instead of on the beginning of the Sabbath (which of course began at sundown the following day).

Another chance. Judas would not be able to betray him before the dinner.

Ezra came over and said something to Thomas, presumably about Judas. He and David were keeping a constant watch on him. "David and I will be waiting in the garden," he said audibly. Only the Twelve were to eat the dinner this night.

Matthew entered the room last, with the rest of the students already lying on the dining-couches (Judas entered with Philip and James the Owl on either side of him, so even if Andrew had wanted to do something to him, he could not have managed. How he longed to choke the life out of him!), and as Matthew took his place, Jesus nodded to see that the number was complete, and rose, took off his robe, and picked up a towel and a basin and went to the students to wash their feet.

"Master, are you going to wash my feet?" asked the Rock.

"You do not understand what I am doing at the moment," said Jesus. "Afterwards, you will see what it was."

"You will not wash my feet!" exclaimed the Rock. Only slaves did such things. "Ever!"

Jesus looked over at him, with an enigmatic smile. "If I do not wash you, you will have no share in the inheritance I am to receive."

"Oh, well, then, Master, not just my feet! Wash my hands and face also!"

Jesus laughed and said, "One who has bathed needs only his feet washed; the rest of him is clean. And you people are clean." He looked around at them. "Though not all of you," he added, seriously. So he knew. Of course he knew.

But Judas did not. Or if he did, he was a master of composure, even looking thoughtful. He had not made up his

mind, thought Andrew. Typical. Judas would have to justify himself before he could carry it out. He would have to find something he could twist into an act of malice on Jesus's part toward him. Well, he would find no malice in Jesus; he would have to make it up. He even did not flinch when Jesus came to him and washed his feet.

After he had finished and put his robe back on and lain down again, he said to all of them "Now. Do you know what I have done to you? You call me 'Teacher,' and 'Master,'—your owner—and you are right. That is what I am. Now if your Master and Teacher washes your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow."

Everyone looked around, wondering if he meant this literally, or if it was another metaphor. "I am not speaking to all of you," said Jesus. "I know the ones I chose. I am saying it to fulfill what was written, 'One who is eating bread with me has raised his heel to stomp on me.' And I am telling you before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe me."

He went on talking, but everyone had caught what he was driving at and began talking at once to each other. Would Judas be able to interpret this as an act of malice?

Jesus then shuddered and sobbed out, "Amen amen I tell you, one of you will betray me!" He was having the chance, but Jesus knew. He knew.

Everyone else was concerned that it might be himself, and began asking Jesus. John, who was in the seat of honor in front of Jesus, leaned back and whispered, "Master, who is it?" as if he did not know, and Jesus whispered back, "It is the one I give a piece of bread to after I have dipped it in the sauce." No

one, except Andrew—and Judas—noticed this little exchange. It was common for a person in front of another at the table to lean back and make a remark. Nothing happened for a while.

Afterward, far enough away from their whispered conference to make it not seem connected, Jesus dipped a piece of bread in the sauce and handed it to Judas: a gesture of particular friendship. He was even saying to Judas by this, “I know you are the one, but I hold no malice against you. Think better of what you are doing.”

But it was obvious that Judas—who had to have been on pins and needles—connected the gesture to what John and Jesus had said to each other. Of *course* he would. He would be suspicious of anything unusual, and here were two unusual things: a whispered exchange in the context of “Who is it?” and a gesture of special friendship. His mind, which had twisted everything to fit his theory, would have twisted this as a signal to John and an insult to him, and by accident he had interpreted it almost correctly. There was no insult. Jesus was telling him he was still his friend, even if he knew what he had had in mind.

But Judas’s mind had been poisoned. He could no more believe this than he could believe that Jesus and the Father were one and the same thing. Jesus saw this, and said, in a voice of resignation, “Do, then, what you were to do; but be quick about it.” And Judas left.

It was night.

John tried to rise to follow him and kill him or stop him somehow, but Jesus, who was lying behind him, put his arm across his chest and held him down. John took in his breath to shout, “You fools! Stop that traitor!” but before he could

actually pronounce the words, Jesus said in his ear, “No!”

“But why?” he whispered.

“I will explain afterward. If we do not let him go, it would be a calamity for all of us.”

After Judas had gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has shown what he really is. And what God is has been shown in him. And if what God is—” Andrew started to rise to run after Judas, to kill him—or at least to keep him from going to the Pharisees, but he made the mistake of looking at Jesus, who shook his head.

Why?

Why? He had the chance and rejected it. Why did they not save themselves from what he was to do?

But then Jesus said, resignedly, as much to Andrew as to the rest, “Children, I am with you only a few moments, and I now tell you what I told the Judeans: you cannot come where I am going.”

If they could not come, then perhaps at least they would not be killed! At least not crucified with him! But if he were crucified, what *difference* would it make!

“I now give you a new commandment: You are to love each other. You are to have the same love for each other that I have for you. This is how everyone will recognize you for my students: by the love you have for each other.” Andrew thought, We are even to love Judas! *He* does! How *can* he? Because Judas is!—whatever that means. He loves Judas, even though Judas is about to commit the greatest sin that has ever been committed in this world! Andrew could not understand it! *Certainly* not share it!

And he almost heard Jesus say, “Some day, you will. Fear

not, Judas will ultimately fail.” He could not see how.

And he knew that Jesus would say: “Try to try. I do not ask for success, but that you try.” Andrew could not bring himself actually to try, but he *did*—for an instant—try to do so—and failed spectacularly every time he thought of what Judas was doing—and what he *had* been doing to destroy each of them! How *could* he?

Simon Rock suddenly broke in with, “Master, where are you going?” and Jesus answered, “You cannot follow me now where I am going. You will come after me later.”

“Master,” the Rock answered. “Why can I not follow you now? I will give up my life for you!” The fool! He had no idea what that meant! And to think that this is *my own* brother!

Jesus answered, in an ironically amused way, “You will give up your life for me? Amen I tell you, a rooster will not crow before you have repudiated me three times! But do not be worried. Trust in God, and trust in me.”

There it was again. Trust. This was going to make sense somehow, even if the horrible prediction came true. It *had* to, or God had nothing to do with it. But Jesus was *God* and was obviously managing it—but leaving everyone free.

The thought occurred to Andrew that perhaps he should sin and rush out and drive a dagger into Judas! Then Jesus could manage the aftermath without actually being betrayed.

If only he had thought of this sooner! Now it was too late! Judas would already be at the Pretorium or wherever he went; and certainly, he would get there before Andrew could discover where it was.

And *that* had been managed by Jesus also. Andrew was tempted to curse Jesus for this—but he realized that Jesus was

managing things for the best for everyone. This night and what happened was arranged to minimize the damage, and to enable the world to be saved—evidently, for some reason now, through the sacrificial death of Jesus.

He did not *have* to die, but if he was not accepted, it seemed that the world's salvation was to come through his death. Our rejection of him *was* a sacrifice of him; we had spiritually killed his mission. And this sacrifice was to be made visible by the most horrible death anyone could die; stoning was child's play by comparison. From the beginning, he came to restore the world to what it had been, or to die to show what rejection of him meant. Restoring the world was now out of the question, and so now he had to make the death only his own death, so that it would appear as his sacrifice.

He had tried every way possible to stop people from blocking Judas, presumably because that would cause a riot, with all the students killed and no one to pass on the truth. This way, it would be clear that Jesus had freely given up his life—as he had *said* he would—and no one would take it away from him, and people would be able to see the horror—the unspeakable anguish and pain and disgrace and degradation—of his crucifixion as his freely accepted supreme gesture of dying to save the world from its multitudinous sins! How could he do it? Certainly, only he could do it!

It made sense, if one looked at it this way, but how could one do so? Not now, of a certainty. Only people in the future! But Andrew had to live through it! He could not bear it! Just the thought of crucifixion made him want to throw up!

Jesus's words broke through into his consciousness again. "I am leaving (Leaving!) to make a place ready for you. And if

I do go and have a place made ready for you, I will come back (He *will* come back!) and take you with me, so that you will be with me where I am. And at least you know the way there.” (Where I am? Heaven? Bliss? How *could* there be bliss with this as its prelude? How *could anything* erase this?)

Thomas could not stand it. “Master,” he said, “we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way there?”

“*I* am the way,” answered Jesus, looking at him with indulgent kindness. “And I am truth, and life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you know the Father also. And you do know him; you have seen him.”

And then Philip blurted in his naive eagerness. “Show us the Father, Master, and that will be all we need!”

Jesus snapped, “I have been with you—*all—this—time*, Philip, and you *still* do not know who I am? Anyone who looks at *me* is *seeing* the Father! How can you tell me to show you the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? It is not from *me* the words I say come from; the father, who lives in me is using them to do what he wants done! Believe me that I am *in* the Father, and the Father is in me! Or at least believe it because of what I have done!” You fool! thought Andrew. *I* am what the Father *looks like!* The Father and I are one and the same thing!

He closed his eyes and shook his head in exasperation. Then, more calmly, he sighed and said, “Amen amen I tell you, anyone who believes in me will do the things I have done; he will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask the Father in my name.”

Because, thought Andrew, *we* will be one and the same,

somehow as Jesus, who is one and the same as the Father, though distinct from him. We will still be ourselves, but . . .

THIRTY-FOUR

But he will not do what we ask him now, thought Andrew: he will not keep himself from being killed, no matter how fervently we want it, and no matter how many of us ask it. Because he knew, for some reason, that what was going to happen would minimize the damage to us, and leave him to make the sacrifice, which for some reason now had to be made.

True, the Judean people—and for that matter, the Romans in the person of Pontius Pilate—had not yet formally rejected him. But they would. He would give them more chances to accept him, but they would not.

And thus, we could not go where he was going now, but he would come back and take us to where he really was—with the Father, one supposes—and then every tear would somehow be wiped away. How? How impossible to believe!

Andrew kept saying to himself, “Do not do it, Master; we are not worth it! Do not do it, Master; we are not worth it!” But he knew that. He loves us because we *are*, not because we are worth anything. It makes no sense! If that is love, how can

anyone love as he loves! To love those who most deserve hate! He loves even Judas! Even now!

With human beings it is impossible, but with God everything is possible. It is not possible for me! I have tried to try, and cannot even do that!

He all but heard Jesus tell him, “Be patient.” and he wanted to scream aloud in reply, but did not.

Then, toward the end of the dinner, Jesus held up one of the pieces of unleavened bread, and said, “Take this and eat it. This is my body, which will be given up for you.” He handed pieces to each of them. So *that* was what it was. This was, “Unless you eat the meat of my body, you will not have life in you”!

Another thing impossible to believe! This “bread” which Andrew took was Jesus’s body! Well, if God the Son could transform himself into a man, why could not God the Man transform himself into a piece of bread? One was just as absurd as the other. So if I can believe the one, why can I not believe the other?

And he ate the body of his Master.

And of course, it was no different from eating bread, just as seeing God before him was no different from seeing a man—except, he suspected, on Mount Tabor, when Simon and John and James were frightened out of their wits by seeing something approximating what Jesus really would look like if divinity were visible.

And his eating the “bread” which was Jesus put Jesus inside him, made him somehow grow into Jesus—not “another” Jesus, but the one Jesus, just as each part of the bread was one and the same bread. He was now somehow one

and the same as Jesus—except that only the Jesus in front of him was going to be nailed up stark *naked!*

And then he took the cup and declared. “Take this, all of you—and he pointedly looked at Thomas when he said this—and drink from it. This is the cup of my blood, ratifying the new treaty—blood which will be shed for you and for many, many others so that sins will be forgiven.”

Andrew wondered how Thomas would react when the cup was passed to him. He looked at Jesus who, just as in Cana, nodded permission, but as he tasted the blood, fear filled his face; it was, as Andrew knew, exactly like wine. But it would do him no harm. How could it, if Jesus has given him permission? Still, Thomas was struggling with the sensation.

“Come now; let us go out.”

As they walked through the darkness, Jesus was saying, “What I really am is a vine, and my Father is the farmer. He cuts off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and prunes back every one that does bear fruit, so that it will bear more. And you have already been pruned by what I said to you. Stay in me, and let me stay in you. You cannot bear fruit unless you stay in me, any more than a branch can bear fruit if it does not stay on the vine.”

So we *were* Jesus, Andrew mused. The vine included the branches, and the branches on the vine were really in part what the vine was; they lived *as* the vine. So I somehow live as myself *and* as Jesus, insofar as I am a branch of his. Jesus is not simply myself, but I am in some sense also Jesus! What a mystery!

And I feel no different. No different at all. The Age of Faith has begun, where we will no longer see what is real, and will have to believe it without seeing. God save us!

And of course, he *is* saving us by this horror!—this outrage!—this *abomination* Judas is bringing on us! No, that the Judean people—*And* the Romans, because Judeans do not crucify—that the *human race* is bringing on us!

Judas had been cut off the vine, Andrew surmised; he would wither and be lost, unless he was grafted back in. Andrew could not bring himself to wish that this would happen.

“You did not choose me,” Jesus was saying. “I chose you, and I have put you here for you to go on and bear fruit, and for your fruit to last! But I *command* you to love each other.” Andrew thought he could *not* love Judas. How could he? With man it is not possible, but with God everything is possible.

But not yet, if ever! Let us get *through* this, Master, first! It was the coward’s way out, he knew—and he tried to try, but failed again.

And then Jesus prayed for them, that they too would be one and the same thing as he was, just as he was one and the same thing as the Father. And presumably Andrew was living with Jesus’s own life, after he had eaten and drunk him. He was in some sense God Almighty.

A sorry example of God Almighty! How *hard* it was to believe all this! If this was the Age of Faith, he was grateful that he had lived through its prelude and actually *seen* things that made faith possible. He pitied future generations, who had to rely on what he and his descendants—if there ever were any—said.

They arrived at the garden. As they went through the gate, Jesus told them to wait and try to sleep while he went over farther with John, his brother James and the Rock, where

he prostrated himself on a large stone, and prayed, obviously in agony himself. Andrew felt another twinge of jealousy that he did not belong to that group.

But then he thought that he perhaps did not need the special treatment that they needed. Certainly Simon did—*expecially* if he were to be their chief when Jesus was no longer with them. Andrew then thanked God that *he* did not have the task of representing an absent Jesus. Perhaps Simon, who did not take time to think, would be able to manage it.

And there was Jesus, *pleading* with the Father, and *begging* the Father to take his cup from his lips! “But have your will be done, not mine!” This was Jesus-the-man pleading with the identical being Jesus-as-God! Evidently the God-aspect of Jesus knew what he had to undergo, and the human aspect rebelled with all his might. But then: “But have your way, not mine.” The human “side” of Jesus submitted, for all his terror and anguish. Now that he would be rejected, it had to be!

He came back for comfort, and they were asleep! He complained, but seemed to understand. Andrew could not sleep, but the ones Jesus needed to lean on could not stay awake! If I had been there, with Jesus relying on me, would I be able to stay awake? He doubted it.

And Jesus went back to praying again, and his face became bloody, somehow, as if his sweat were blood! He was writhing on the ground in agony—but there was some being there who was comforting him, a being Andrew could somehow sense without seeing.

Once again Jesus came back, but now he said in a voice of trembling with agony and total exhaustion, “Sleep, now, and try to rest.” and then lifted his head as he heard a noise. “Rise,

let us go forward. The traitor is here,” he said calmly, as if the crisis had strengthened him to endure it, in spite of his weakened condition. Blood was still streaming over his face, but he made no effort to wipe it off, as one who is in great sorry makes no effort to wipe away his tears. Tears of blood from every pore in his head!

And through the gate came Judas with a contingent from the High Priest and some Roman soldiers, armed with torches, lanterns, clubs, and other weapons..

Judas then came up and kissed Jesus. Kissed him! *Kissed* him! And then wiped off the blood that had transferred to his face. As if he could! That blood would cling to Judas until his death! Which could not come soon enough!

Jesus made a reply in a low voice, and then stepped forward and said, “Who is it you are looking for?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” answered the soldier in charge.

“That is the one I AM,” said Jesus, and the words “I AM” rang through the garden like the tolling of a huge bell, almost deafening everyone. The soldiers, along with Judas, stepped back, and fell prostrate in terror.

After a short while of dead silence, Jesus said again, “Who is it you are looking for?”

The attackers got to their feet, and the commander answered in a small, shaking voice, “Jesus of, ah, Nazareth.”

“I told you that was the one I was,” said Jesus.

Then the Rock, who had for some unaccountable reason a sword, drew it and slashed at the head of one of the High Priest’s slaves; but the slave dodged, and all he accomplished was to cut off his ear. Typical. Andrew felt like grabbing the sword from him and doing some real damage, and being

gloriously killed in the scuffle! But he did nothing, of course.

“Put your sword back in its sheath!” snapped Jesus, and the Rock, trembling, complied. “Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?”

“Allow me to do this much,” he told the commander, and picked up the man’s ear and reattached it. Everyone was dumbfounded, and simply stood there, while Jesus said, “If I am the one you want, then let these people go,” and waved for his students to escape, and Andrew, like all the other cowards, ran toward the gate, Andrew hoping that some soldier would slash at him and put him out of his misery. But all the soldiers and the high priest’s slaves just stood there, watching them.

Andrew, like most of the others, ran up the hill until he could go no farther. He stopped, his hand on a low wall, panting and gasping for breath.

No one had followed. Just as no one noticed Jesus and his companions when Jesus did not want to be noticed, no one noticed them now. He was safe. Jesus wanted them not to be killed, and so they would not be killed.

Why was he safe? Why was he not there with Jesus?

Because it was not *his* sacrifice that mattered. His dying would simply be a waste, and Jesus, for some insane reason, loved him.

Then he might as well go back and see what was happening. But he now felt invincible, and took no care to hide himself. Evidently, they would take Jesus either to the Antonia fortress, or more probably to the High Priest’s palace for trial first. Andrew wondered whether John would be able to get in to see it; he was too honest not to admit that he was a follower of Jesus—but on the other hand, he was a student of the

former high priest himself, and everyone there knew him.

Andrew wandered down to the palace, and of course was not admitted. “Did John, son of Zebedee come here?” he asked the woman at the gate.

“He did. He is inside, with one other. But we cannot admit anyone else.”

“I will wait outside, then.”

And wait.

And wait.

He walked around the palace, how many times he could not count, but he simply could not stay in one place. Once or twice, he thought he saw another follower; but they were not eager to be seen, and certainly were not in a mood for chitchat. And, of course, no one could do anything.

After an inordinate time, Simon—so *he* was the one with John!—came out, sobbing and weeping.

Andrew went over, “What happened?”

“Ask me not! I would kill myself, except that I would botch even that! Ask me not!” And he ran off, in tears.

Did not Jesus say, “Before a rooster crows, you will repudiate me three times”? It must have happened. He got in with John, but someone probably became suspicious, because he had made such an ass of himself in the garden!—and of course, he would try to throw off suspicion. How well he knew Simon! He would not turn traitor; he would simply speak without thinking!

Well, who is to say that I would not do the same, if I were in there? He was in fear of his life, after all; one did not think clearly in those circumstances.

Of course, when did Simon ever think clearly?

Oh, well, what difference did it make? And the Master knew that it was going to happen, and so presumably forgave him.

What difference did *anything* make! The Master would be dead in twelve hours!

It *could* not happen!

But it was *going* to happen. And there was nothing that anyone—but Jesus—could do about it; and he would do nothing to prevent it. He even reattached the ear to the man Simon had mutilated! What a *fool* I have for a brother!

But what difference did it make?

Dear Master, dear Father, please! . . . And he could not even ask, because—and he remembered a passage from Isaiah, “How can I tell him? He is the one who has done it!”

He wanted to go somewhere—anywhere but here!—and wait until it was all over.

But he could not move.

Then, around dawn, a group of guards, one of whom seemed to be the centurion Matthew knew, took a battered, broken Jesus—Andrew gasped as he caught sight of him; he was all but unrecognizable, beaten unmercifully, with an enormous bruise under his left eye—out of the palace toward the Antonia, where the Governor, Pontius Pilate, had his headquarters. He followed. He noticed that John was there; he had come out of the palace, as Andrew surmised, but Andrew could not bring himself to ask what had happened. It was all too clear what had happened.

And they waited, along with several other students, each by himself and lost in his own agony, outside on what they called the “Pavement,” looking up at a balcony where the

Governor sometimes appeared. The members of the Sanhedrin did not enter, because that night was the Passover, and they would defile themselves if they went into a Gentile's establishment. Andrew thought with irony. "They do not want to defile themselves, while they defile themselves with the blood of the very God they claim to serve!

A crowd gathered.

And they waited.

The governor emerged, and asked, "What is the charge you are bringing against this man?" referring to Jesus, who had gone in with him.

"If he were not a criminal, we would not have brought him before you," was the shouted answer from one of the Judeans.

"Very well, then you take him and try him by your own laws."

"We are not allowed to put anyone to death!" they shouted. Pilate shrugged, and smiled his customary meaningless smile, and went back inside to speak once again to Jesus.

And they waited.

After a while, a rather nervous Pilate emerged, still with his false smile, and said, "I do not see that you have a case against him. And you have a custom that I let a prisoner go for you at the Passover. Do you wish me to release this 'King of Judea'?"

"Not him!" shouted the Pharisees. "Barabbas!" Pilate was not happy about this, but he went back inside, apparently to prepare Jesus for execution.

And they waited. For a long time.

Finally, a definitely nervous Pilate came out again and

said, "I am now going to bring him out, to show you that *I* find nothing wrong with what he did." And Jesus emerged, full of blood and spittle, wearing a red soldier's cloak as if it were royal robes, and a crown on his head that seemed to be made of thorns. He swayed and almost fell, and one of the guards held him up. "There is your man," said Pilate; "look at him."

The people were too shocked to say anything for a moment, and then one of the Pharisees shouted, "Crucify him!" and the cry became a chorus. "Crucify him!"

There it was. They had managed to show him humiliated and degraded, and if there was one thing a Judean could not stand, it was someone in disgrace. The crowd instantly turned against him.

"You take him yourselves and crucify him," shouted Pilate over the din. "I have no crime to charge him with."

"We have a law," they screamed, "and that law says he has to die, because he made himself the Son of God!"

Pilate looked at Jesus with alarm and consternation. He went back inside with him. What was this? Had Jesus convinced him that he was more than human?

And they waited.

The Judeans were conferring as to what to do if he said he would let him go. They seemed to come to a consensus on the best answer.

Pilate came out, and in a shaken voice said, "I am going to release him. If you let him go, you are no ally of Caesar!" they shouted. "Everyone who claims to be King is committing treason against Caesar!"

Pilate, trembling with fear that a riot would start, had his

judgment-seat brought out and called for Jesus to be brought also. He stood him beside himself and said, "Look at him! That is your King!" It sounded as if he meant it.

But they had won, and they knew it. "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"You want *me* to crucify your *King?*" said Pilate.

"We have no King but Caesar!" they shouted.

Pilate's face gradually relaxed into the self-satisfied smirk he usually wore, and he sentenced Jesus to be crucified, first washing his hands in front of the people and claiming that he himself was innocent of his blood. No one paid attention. There was screaming and shouting everywhere, but there was no one who was a partisan of Jesus; they were all against him, now that they had seen him beaten and degraded. They only wanted the degradation to be complete by seeing him hanging naked on a cross, fouling himself with his own excrement.

And then Jesus and two other prisoners emerged, heavily guarded, with the cross-beams of their crosses on their backs. Jesus, now in his normal clothes, almost collapsed under his cross right at the beginning, because he had spent the night after that dreadful agony in the garden being beaten and mocked by the High Priest's guards, and then apparently whipped within an inch of his life by Pilate's soldiers, who afterward crowned him with the thorns and beat him over the head as they spat on him.

And after several steps, he did fall, and looked as if he was not going to get up. The soldiers lifted him to his feet again, and began looking around. Their eyes fastened on a man almost as big as Andrew, and they told him to carry Jesus's cross behind him. They did not want him dying before he

experienced the crucifixion itself. Andrew tried to push himself forward to take the cross away from this man; it was the least he could do. But he could not force his way through, and eventually gave up.

On the way, Jesus saw his mother, who looked as if she were about to faint. They nodded to each other, silently. Jesus had to save his breath, and Mary had no words. John went up beside her and held her hand.

There were a number of women there also, who were not of those who were cursing and mocking him, and he did stop and say something to them as they wept. Andrew saw John trying to protect Mary from being crushed to death by the crowd.

And then Jesus fell again, now without the burden of the cross. Andrew again pushed forward, hoping to get beside Jesus and hold him up. But again he failed.

And Jesus slipped on the stones of the narrow street and fell once again, now about ten or a dozen cubits ahead of them, with the Skull Place in sight. It looked as if he could not get up this time, but the—the centurion *was* the one Matthew knew!—lifted him rather gently, with a look of extreme anguish on his face. Did he know who?—was he not the one whose commander's son was saved from death by a mere word from Jesus? He was! Then he must know who it was he was about to execute!

After an eternity, they arrived, and the prisoners were stripped and laid on top of the crossbeams. The centurion himself drove the nails into the heels of Jesus's hands. Jesus said something, and the centurion paused with eyes closed in pain and the mallet raised, and almost dropped it, but then

steeled himself and drove the nail in, after which Jesus and the crossbeam were lifted onto the upright, and his feet nailed, one beside the other, onto the upright. The others were crucified in the same way, one on each side of Jesus. The screams were blood-curdling, though Jesus himself merely kept grunting in agony, trying to find a position which was not absolutely intolerable, and not finding one. He arched his back, but that drove the thorns into the back of his head, and apparently that pain was the worst of all.

John stood in front with Mary and her relative, Clopas's Mary; and then Mary Magdalene came up with them. And they watched and waited. Andrew kept himself back a bit. He simply could not go and actually talk with anyone.

And they waited.

And the soldiers finally began dividing the clothes they had taken off the prisoners; but when they saw that Jesus's tunic had no seams, one of them said, "We should not tear it; it will be worth more intact. Let us play dice for it." Andrew thought that was familiar somehow.

He saw John look at Mary and say, "This was prophesied!"

She answered. "I know."

"But what can it mean?"

"Ours," she answered, "is not to understand it; merely to endure it."

Andrew could not endure it, but he stayed there and endured it perforce, simply because he could not leave. And it began to grow dark in the middle of the day, without a cloud in the sky.

Someone screamed, "It is an eclipse of the sun!" and

someone else answered, “No. Eclipses only happen on the new moon. The moon passes in front of the sun. The moon is now full. The sun is losing its light!”

“God have mercy on us!” Everyone began beating his breast.

Jesus looked over at his mother and John, and said, “Madam, that is—that is your—son.” and then he said to John, “That is your—mother.” John, his eyes overflowing, took her hand again.

The centurion found Matthew in the crowd, and went over to him, speaking to him with a look of terror on his face.

And then Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” and the centurion, in panic at the darkness, since it was almost as if it were night, called for a sponge, and dipped it in the bucket of wine the soldier had, putting it on his spear and holding it to Jesus’s lips.

When he had moistened them, he said, “It is over!” and screamed and let his head drop.

And the scream prolonged itself into a huge roar, and the ground shook, and the rock on which they were standing split under them. Everyone fell to the ground.

THIRTY-FIVE

BUT IT WAS NOT THE END OF THE WORLD. The sun shone anew and the ground stopped shaking—though a huge rock near the cross had split in two. Andrew walked over to look in awe at it, while he heard the centurion—Matthew’s friend—say, “He really *was* the Son of God!” Andrew wanted to tell him, “How does it feel to have killed God Almighty?” but the man was so terribly shaken by what he had witnessed—and done—that he could not.

Some of the others, evidently Pharisees, now insolent because the world had not come to an end, approached the centurion and pointed to the sign above his head. “It should not say, ‘The King of Judea,’ it should say, ‘He *claimed to be* the King of Judea.’” The centurion said, “You will have to take that up with Pontius Pilate himself. I have simply obeyed his orders.” They left.

Andrew himself was still panting from fright, and his legs were jelly. He had not really believed that the world was coming to an end, because Jesus had said he would return, but

that did not save him from fearing that it was happening. In a way, he wished it had happened, because what sense would there be now in going on? Everyone saw Jesus hanging there, begging for a drink, naked in front of everyone. How could anyone who saw him thus—or even knew that he had been crucified—believe a word of what he said?

That would be the miracle of miracles! If the name of Jesus as a great religious leader survived this. Andrew had heard that a man named Socrates was put to death in Greece and was now revered as a great moral leader; but he had merely drunk a concoction of hemlock, which gradually paralyzed him. His was a dignified death, nothing like the monstrosity that Andrew had witnessed. He almost turned to look at the corpse on the cross, and as soon as he caught sight of it out of the corner of his eye, he turned away in agony. He had not been able to watch the actual torture either, and had placed himself at the very edge of the crowd, hating every one of them who made crude or insolent remarks, but not having the strength to remonstrate, let alone fight.

He had to leave here!—and go—where? Anywhere, anywhere out of sight of this abomination! How *could* they? But his legs could barely support him. He turned away, mentally apologizing to Jesus for deserting him, and shuffled off.

Somehow, he managed to find himself at the entrance to the room in which they had eaten the Last Supper. He was about to mount the stairs, wondering if he could make it to the top, and a man he knew named Joseph, from Arimathea, and Nicodemus, the member of the Sanhedrin who had come to Jesus during the night, approached him. “Do you think you

could help us take Jesus down from the cross?” said Joseph. “I saw Pilate just now, and have his permission.”

“We must hasten,” said Nicodemus. “It grows late in the afternoon, and we must have him buried—at least after a fashion—before sundown.”

“I would be glad to help, if I can,” said Andrew, beginning to feel almost human, now that there was something useful to do. “But where could we bury him? How could we find a place before nightfall?”

“Oh, on that there is no problem. I have a tomb just a few steps away, and no one has ever been buried in it. It was to be mine and my wife’s. We would be honored to have Jesus laid in it; and we can always buy another.”

“Then we had best start.” He shouldered a huge sack of unguents and other burial spices that Nicodemus was struggling to carry, and as quickly as they could, the three went back to the crosses. One or two other students came along, one with a ladder.

Since Andrew was by far the strongest, he mounted the ladder and with some difficulty pried the nail from Jesus’s right hand. Immediately, the body leaned upon him, and he managed to get the arm over his shoulder and support the body while he climbed down. A bit of blood trickled from the hand that had the nail, but practically all had already left the body.

Leaving the body atilt, so to speak, he reset the ladder and mounted it on the other side, calling to the other students to free the feet when he was ready to set the other arm free. He worked at the nail, and then, as the body sagged over him, he got it under the shoulder again, and suddenly its full weight

fell upon him, almost knocking him off the ladder.

The others then freed the feet, and Andrew carried the body down the few steps of the ladder to the ground. It was not as awkward as it might seem, because the body was already beginning to stiffen. The arms, for instance, were almost stiff, although the shoulders still swung freely.

When he got it down, others took it, two by the shoulders and two by the feet, and laid it on top of one half of the shroud, which they had placed on the ground; Jesus's head was in the middle, and his feet not quite at the end of the cloth. Nicodemus then put the spices on the body, and said, "We will do this thus, without washing the body, lest there be some of the lifeblood still there, which must be buried with it." A woman—Andrew thought it was Chusa's Joanna, objected, but Nicodemus was adamant. "Well then," she said, "when the Sabbath is over and he is not bleeding any longer, we will give him a decent wash and a real burial." Nicodemus began to object, but she cut him off with "Tell me not what you think! That is what will happen!" Andrew was grateful he did not have to get involved in that wrangle.

After Jesus's body was prepared as well as it could be (fortunately, the hands could be placed over his privates without any difficulty), the top half of the shroud, which did not have the body on it, was folded over the bottom half, and then the bottom half was brought up over the feet, and the top half folded over them. The cloth to cover the face was then placed around the head and tied over the shroud, and the body was ready to be transported to the tomb.

Andrew once again took the upper part of the body, since it would have been more difficult for two people to carry that

end, wrapped as it was, and two people took the feet. They did not have far to walk, which was fortunate, because the sun was about to dip below the horizon, and placed the body on a slab in the tomb. A couple of the women came in and straightened out the cloths as neatly as they could, and then everyone left, with a last fond look at the Master they had revered. There were tears, but no wailing; everyone had a faint hope that this was only temporary—though no one quite dared to say as much, confronted with the stark reality of the death.

The men then rolled the heavy stone in front of the entrance to the tomb, and then, to their surprise, came two Roman soldiers, who sealed it and took up guard positions. When Matthew asked them what they were doing, they answered, in Latin. “Orders from the Governor. He wants to assure the high priest that no one will violate the tomb and steal the body.”

They then made the short walk back to the upper room in silence.

And they waited.

Andrew went over and sat by Simon, who was writhing in agony. He put his arm over Simon’s shoulder, and Simon said, “Three times! Just as he said! As soon as I had done it, a rooster crowed. Just as he said! How *could* I?”

“Fear not,” said Andrew. “He knew—he knows—and he still loves you. You will see. He understands.” Even Andrew understood, to some extent. Simon was not thinking what he was saying. Who was? They were all at their wits’ end, with what was going on.

And Jesus, if—when—he returned, would confirm this. None of them had made a hero of himself, and Jesus had not

expected it; he let them all—cowards that he knew them to be—run off while he confronted the Romans and the Judeans by himself.

Alone.

“Could you not stay awake *one hour* with me?”

But he did not reproach them, even the chosen three.

But how could they survive the three days?

But perhaps it would not be three days. The day he died, the day before this ghastly night, was one day, and then tonight and tomorrow were another day, and then after sundown tomorrow was the third day.

If they could only survive the Sabbath! Then he would return.

How absurd! With holes in his hands and feet? And that gash in his side that the soldier had given him to prove that he was indeed dead. “You see?” he had said, “The blood separates thus into red liquid and clear after death.” At least, they did not have to break his bones and have his whole weight on his hands, choking him with it.

—Stop! Do not think on it!

And shortly afterward, they slept, because no one had energy to do anything else, and then woke and existed once again—forever and ever.

No one moved. Eating was unthinkable. They existed, and wished they did not.

There was a discussion, with Nicodemus, on whether they could go back to the tomb on the day after this Sabbath and anoint and bury him properly. Nicodemus began citing various authorities about the rules for burial, when Chusa’s Joanna once again broke in with, “Unless there is some explicit

provision in the Torah against it, then it most certainly *will* be done!” When Nicodemus demurred and said, “Madame, it is not so simple,” she cut him off with, “Give me none of your ‘interpretations!’ If you cannot find it in the very words of Moses, then I will hear none of it! Has not the Master himself said that these ‘interpretations’ have made the Law a prison instead of the joy it was supposed to be? Tell me not what your ‘interpreters’ think!” Good for her! thought Andrew. Who would have thought she had it in her! She actually silenced them!

After an eternity, someone asked “Does anyone know what happened? Why he was condemned?” Nicodemus was about to speak, when John said, “I was there at the very beginning, when he was taken to the former High Priest Annas,” and he told how Annas had tried to question him, and Jesus had replied that they should question those who heard him—“at which,” said John, “the soldier *slapped* him and said, ‘Is that the way you answer the High Priest?’” He paused, overcome at the memory.

“And then what?” said someone.

“Then he said,” went on John, “If I have said something illegal, then bring a charge against me for it. But if what I said was legal, why did you slap me?”

“And what did the High Priest say?”

“He sent him on to Caiaphas, that year’s High Priest, for trial. He told me that obviously, Jesus was going to say nothing, which was the most prudent course for him, and further questioning was useless.”

“Did you go to the trial?”

“No, they would not let me in.”

Nicodemus then described the trial, and how they could not find any consistent evidence against him, until Caiaphas issued his command and Jesus told them he would be coming in the clouds of heaven, “Which was a quotation from Ezekiel indicating that he was divine, and he had referred to himself as ‘I AM’ just before it, so they found him guilty.”

Philip broke in, “Why did they not stone him then and there?”

Thomas said, “I can answer that. Because there would have been a riot. They had to have him executed by Rome for several reasons: first, not to make it appear that they were the ones who did it, or we brave, dauntless, intrepid followers of his ~~would—~~”

You ran off as fast as anyone else!” cried Philip.

“I am all too painfully aware of that,” he replied. “They had nothing whatever to fear from us, as was so blatantly demonstrated; but they did not know that. Second, they had to discredit him; and stoning would make him look like one of the other prophets, and would certainly not endear *them* to the people who had heard him denounce them as the descendants of those who had stoned his predecessors. But crucifixion—well, you saw it, and you heard what people were saying. How could anyone respect a person who had been through that? How could anything he said carry any authority after everyone saw him hanging there, stark *naked!* *Pleading* for a drop of *water!* I cannot *bear* it!” He was merely echoing what everyone was thinking.

He paused and took a breath. “You see? It was brilliantly done. The whole council would be in favor of it, because he had shown to their faces that he was a blasphemer—”

“He was *not* a blasphemer. It was *true!* He *is* the Son of God! Still!” cried Philip.

“You believe that, and, in spite of what you think, so do I—I think—I know not. I know nothing now. *Pleading* for a drink! . . . But you see my point. If even we doubt it because we saw him there, how would anyone else ever be convinced?”

“He will come back! He said he would! How can you doubt?”

“Philip, Philip, do not—it is time to grow up, Philip. You will finish by giving these poor women hysterical illusions. His spirit will return, and when we recover from this ghastly time—if it is ever possible—we, at least, will be able to live by his precepts, and that will return him to life in us. That was what he meant. Did he not pray that we were to be one thing in him, just as he was one thing in the Father? And that he would be in us just as the Father was in him? That is the return to life that he promised. We need conjure up no mad visions of him walking about to compound the horror of what we have been through.”

“It is *not* a mad vision! He *will* return. *You* are the ones who are mad! How can you *say* such things?”

“Philip, he himself said that he was leaving to send us his Spirit from the Father.”

“And he said he would come *back*! He *said* it!”

“—I cannot bear more of this. I am leaving. —Fear not, Nicodemus, I will not go farther than a Sabbath’s walk. But I *will* go mad if I stay here another instant!”

Philip looked at him with a mixture of anger and disdain, but said nothing further. He left.

“I know where he is going,” said Nathanael, shaking his head sadly. “I am tempted to go myself.”

Ezra came and sat by him, a darker shadow in the dim

room. Neither had anything to say.

And nothing happened.

Andrew now left his position by Simon, and went over to John, who was obviously reliving the night before and that unspeakable day. He sat beside him, and put his arm over his shoulders, gripping his shoulder as he used to do. John looked at him with surprise and gratitude. He had not acted thus in a long time, and clearly John had missed it.

The thought occurred to him that perhaps John felt more than just relieved, and he said to himself, "Nonsense! And if he does, what of it? He is not going to act as if it is anything but fond friendship—which is what it is!" He remembered how Jesus had told John not to be afraid to love anyone, but not to be alone with those who attracted him. He was certainly not alone here—if indeed he *was* attracted in that way to Andrew. Without realizing what he was doing, he looked around the room for Judas, who had poisoned his mind, and realized for the first time that he was not there—of course. He hoped he was dead.

He saw Matthew sitting by Mary. After a while, he had a look almost of hope on his face as he looked at her—and she suddenly realized that he loved her! She looked away, and made some general remark or other, as if musing, and Matthew took it as a gentle rejection; you could see the despair fill his face. He made a remark himself, and they sat, silent.

Finally, they all slept again, because there was nothing else to do.

THIRTY-SIX

THERE WAS A SOFT NOISE IN THE ROOM, which woke Andrew up. The women, who had the previous day prepared the burial spices and water and cloths, were about to leave to bury Jesus. It was the first light of dawn.

This would be the definitive burial, and Jesus's body, still so filthy, would be at last clean. Then Andrew suddenly thought, If there *was* a body! It was now the third day!

And lapsed back into despair. Let them go.

He noticed that Mary of Magdala went out after the others. To watch? What did she know of womanly chores? What difference did it make?

Simon, who had also waked, nodded to John, and they left, immediately after the women. John was definitely in no hurry, but the Rock was walking fast, and so he had to keep up.

And Andrew, fully awake now, waited.

And the longer he waited, the blacker became his despair.

Then, after forever, an excited knock came at the door. Someone opened, and the two men returned, dazed, John carrying what looked like the shroud Jesus had been buried in. "The tomb is empty!" they cried. "Someone has taken him!"

Now what?

There was a knocking at the door. All started in fear, “It is we,” said women’s voices. They opened, and the women who had left entered, and said, speaking by turns and sometimes at the same time, “Jesus was not in the tomb! The stone was rolled away! The soldiers were unconscious! An earthquake or something that moved the stone away had stunned the guards.

“They are hysterical,” said John’s brother James; but the Rock and John simply listened, with mounting excitement.

“And then we saw this huge man—”
 It was an angel! He was all in white, and he glowed brighter than the sun that was rising behind him!” said another.

The first went on, “And he said, ‘Fear not. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has come back to life, as he predicted. Come up and see the place where he had been laid, and then tell his students that he has returned to life and will go ahead of you into Galilee!’

“And we hurried back, and there he was, on the way! And we fell down before him, and he told us to tell his brothers—”
 That was what he called you!

The speaker frowned at the interruption, and went on “—That he had come back to life! And there was something about Galilee!”

“I think he said he was going there, or that we would meet him there, or some such thing. I was too excited to think! Imagine! We actually *saw* him!”

At this point Mary Magdalene came in. “I was not with the others,” she said. “I saw—oh, there you are!—and walked back to the tomb after you ran there, and you were gone when I left. I sat there, looking in, wondering what they had done

with him, and then there were two men in white inside the tomb that I had not noticed, and one said to me, 'Why are you crying, Madame?'

"I said, 'Because they have taken my Master away, and I know not where they have put him.' And then there was a man behind me, and he asked me also why I was crying. I thought he was the gardener, and, without looking at him, I said, 'Oh sir, if you are the one who took him from here, tell me where you put him and let me have him!'

"And he laughed! at me! And then said, 'Mary!' and I realized it was the Master, and I embraced his legs. And he said, 'Now do not be hanging on! I have not risen to my Father just yet! Besides, I want you to go to my—brothers—and tell them that I am going to go up to my Father and your Father and my God and your God!' And he vanished. But he had the marks of the nails in his hands and feet! So I came as quickly as it could."

And then, after the women had told all they knew, and the men had commented until they were tired, nothing happened, forever.

For the whole day.

After noon, the talk died down to morose silence. If he *were* alive, and if the women were *not* hysterical, where *was* he?

Toward evening, there was still nothing but moody silence again. It was all hallucinations!

And again nothing happened, forever.

"Peace to you," said Jesus, who in some unaccountable way was among them, though the door was locked. He had greeted them with the usual Judean greeting, as if nothing had happened. As was his wont. He had an amused smile on his

face, as he looked at everyone, staring dumbfounded.

“Peace to you,” he said again, as if they had not heard. Everyone stood up and began to move. He showed them his hands and side, but they still could not believe they were seeing anything but a ghost. Nathanael looked around for Thomas, and then realized that he was not there. He appeared to think that he was seeing a hallucination, as Thomas had.

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Touch me. A ghost does not have flesh and bones, as I have.” No one dared to do so. Nathanael even shrank away from him.

“Have you anything to eat?” he finally said. Someone timidly handed him a fish, which he ate in front of them. “It is truly I,” he said, in his old voice, and finally they believed. It looked like Jesus, and yet it did not look like Jesus; he was different. But who else would have wounded hands and side, and yet be walking as he was? The difference in his appearance was like the difference in a person one has not seen for thirty years; one knows it is the same person, somehow; and Jesus had entered a wholly new life.

And then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you hold him to them, they remain with him.” And he disappeared as he had come.

“Bartholomew,” said Ezra.

“Yes?”

“You can forgive sins. I cannot; I am a mere observer.” Andrew stopped listening to them. Obviously, this was something private.

Their murmured voices came to an end, whatever it was, and there was a silence for a while, and then Ezra said in a new

tone something more to Nathanael, who answered, loud enough to be heard, "Ezra, I cannot! I—no, I cannot!"

"You must!"

"You go."

"I? I am no Emissary. Perhaps I can forgive sins because I was here when he said it. But I cannot remove the curse from a drunk." He added, growing heated, "Besides, what am I but a slave? Everyone still thinks of me in that way!"

"But—"

"You *must* go! You *must*! Or he will kill himself! And now he *need* not! You *must*!" Evidently, Ezra was sending Nathanael to Thomas—again—who was once again drunk.

"Ezra, I—I cannot! I could not bear to face him that way again!"

"What? Will you be the death of *both* of them?"

Nathanael shrank as if stabbed, and then turned and left the room.

Both of them? Was Nathanael somehow responsible also for the death of Samuel?

John, after a while, left the room also, and then went back to the room, where Ezra met him. "Bartholomew is out finding Thomas," he said.

"I assumed that from what I heard of your conversation. Believe it or not, Samuel met me and told me that all would be well."

"I am so glad! I knew he would be able to do it."

So John saw Samuel—presumably, the real Samuel—who assured him about Thomas and Nathanael. Andrew wondered what Nathanael felt like the second time he saw Thomas about to die from drink. He had acted as if *he* would die if he had to

go through that again. But it seemed that he had been able to do so. In not too long a time, they would once again have Thomas among them. And he would see Jesus also—though it would take some convincing to make him believe it was not a hallucination.

So things were beginning to resolve themselves. And indeed, Thomas was among them on the following day after the Sabbath, when Jesus appeared again. Jesus beckoned to him to come and put his fingers into the holes in his hands, and his hand into his side. Thomas did not want to do it, but finally managed. Nathanael whispered to someone, “He said that he would not believe until he had done this.” And the answer came, “How like Jesus to make him do it!”

But Simon still had not been forgiven for his treason against Jesus. Andrew wondered if he ever would be. But Jesus would not let such a thing go unresolved.

But he did, for weeks. But finally, when they were in Galilee, Simon declared, “I think I will go fishing.” He looked at Andrew, who nodded. Why not? Jesus appeared among them only sporadically, and they had to do something to while away the time.

That evening, they borrowed their old boat from their father, who gladly lent it to them, and several of them—Simon, Andrew, John, Thomas, Philip, and, interestingly, Nathanael, who seemed to have conquered a good deal of his fear of being in a boat, embarked, with Andrew, of course, rowing.

His muscles complained at every stroke, but he would not let anyone know how he had deteriorated. He wondered if he would be able to move on the morrow. Simon cast the net, rather unskillfully, and caught nothing. “Move on somewhere

else,” he whispered, and Andrew once again took up the oars. His arms were a little less rusty now.

Again nothing. The others in the boat were looking around to see if there was any sign of fish, but they all seemed to have deserted the place.

Andrew went to his very favorite spot, but the fish were not there either. It was one of those nights.

Toward morning, they came back again, discouraged, and were annoyed when a voice came from the shore, shouting, “Boys! Have you caught anything worth eating?”

“No!” they shouted back.

“Throw the net over the starboard side, and you’ll find some!”

“Go ahead,” said Andrew. “Perhaps he sees something.”

And Simon threw out the net, and then could not even drag it into the boat, it had so many fish in it. “It is the Master,” cried John. Simon looked up from where he had been standing, naked, and suddenly threw on his robe, and dove into the lake. The other students came over in the boat, which was not far from shore, only a bowshot or so, dragging the net full of fish.

When they landed, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish roasting on it, and some bread. Jesus—it *was* Jesus, was it not?—told them, “Bring over some of the fish you just caught.”

Simon Rock waded in and pulled the net to the beach; it was full of a hundred fifty-three large fish, and yet was not broken, even though there were so many.

“Come and eat,” said Jesus.

None of the students dared ask him who he was, since

they knew that it was the Master.

Jesus then came and took the bread and handed it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was the third time Jesus appeared to his students after coming back to life.

After they had eaten, Jesus asked Simon Rock, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these people?"

"Yes, Master," he said. "You know I am your friend."
"Feed my lambs," he said. Andrew wondered at the reply Simon made. It was as if he did not dare say that he *loved* Jesus, still less that he did so more than the others, after that hideous night in the courtyard.

And then Jesus said again, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" As if to say, "Do you love me at all?"

But Simon answered again, "Yes, Master; you know I am your friend."

"Shepherd my sheep," he said.

A third time, he said, "Simon, son of John, *are* you my friend?" As if he was willing to accept even the affection Simon was willing to admit to.

The Rock was shaken when he asked him for the third time whether he loved him, and he said, "Master, you know everything; you *know* that I am your friend." He could still not say that he loved him. He probably thought, "How can I say I love him if I betrayed him?"

"Feed my sheep," he said. There was a pause. Simon had admitted three times that he was a friend of Jesus, just as he had denied three times that he even knew who he was.

But that was evidently enough for Jesus. The love, which was really there, could come out later. "Amen amen I tell you, when you were younger, you put your belt round you and

walked where you pleased. When you get old, you will hold out your hands, and someone else will take hold of you and lead you where you do not please.”

“Follow me.” He was forgiven. And he did not make effusive protestations of how much he loved him; he was honest and humble. What more could one ask? At least, Jesus asked no more.

Simon went after him, and saw John. “Master, what about him?”

“Suppose I were to want him to stay until I come back; what is that to you? You follow me.”

And then Jesus disappeared. Andrew went over to Simon, who was shaken by the encounter, put his arm over his shoulder, and said, “You did well.” Simon began to relax.

John came up, and Andrew put his arm over John’s shoulder also. His best friend, and his brother—who had his faults, but did not we all?

Epilogue

For the Curious

Now then, what in this novel do I have actual evidence for, and what have I made up? The physical size of Andrew (and any of the characters) is my imagination, as is the rivalry between Andrew and Simon. (By the way, there is no evidence that Simon was the older brother.) I wanted this book to be about envy, and so I had to make Andrew envious. While I was at it, I wanted to show how envy was often disguised as a search for justice, and to reveal the fallacies of that quest.

The first chapter, then, is fiction, except for the fact that the Zebedees and Andrew's family were partners, which is in Luke 5. In Chapter 2, that John learned to read is an inference from the fact that he wrote the Gospel and *Revelation*. (He could have dictated the first, but for various reasons, had actually to have written *Revelation*. The "first letter" is almost certainly, in my mind, a sermon he delivered very late in life; it seems to be the product of an old, old man. The fact that the Zebedee family knew Annas is based on John's report that he

was able to get into Annas's palace when Jesus was captured (and as able to "smuggle" Simon in also). The accident with Samuel is fiction (Samuel himself is fiction, based on John's calling Thomas "the twin").

In Chapter 3, the trip to Jerusalem was a way to get John, Andrew, and Simon into the city without their other relatives, so that what John relates in his Gospel about John the "bather" would be plausible. Of course, everything that happened with the lawyers (as well as what went on in the High Priest's palace) is fiction. John's knowing Mary and Jesus from earlier (e.g. Jesus's building John's boat) is fiction. In Chapter 4, the episode with John the Bather is in all the Synoptics (Mark, Luke, and Matthew—yes, written in that order), as well as the thunder's speaking; and the encounter with the Pharisees is from John 1.

In Chapter 5, Jesus's relating what he could not have heard is fiction. In Chapter 6, Jesus's calling Simon "Rock" is from John 1. The miraculous catch of fish is from Luke, though it is mentioned in the other Synoptics, but the accident with Zebedee in Chapters 6 and 7 is fiction, to make it plausible that he would let the business be disrupted so drastically. There is no evidence that Philip had anything to do with it. Judas's presence at John's bath is fiction. His speculation about why Jesus did not appear for more than a month turns out to have been accurate, based on what we know from Luke and Matthew (and what is hinted at in Mark). Judas's being a priest and having read Plotinus and the Greeks is my imagination. What happened with Philip and Nathanael is from John 1. Ezra is fictional, as is the rest of Chapter 8 and Chapter 9.

In Chapter 10, the preparations for the wedding feast are all fiction, as is the speculation in Chapter 11 about how the Reign of God was to be introduced. The wedding itself, and Mary's role in it, is from John 2, as is the cleansing of the Temple in Chapter 12 (which is also related by the Synoptics, though as if it occurred at the end of Jesus's life). Nicodemus is also spoken of by John 3. The Garden of Gethsemani, however, is only mentioned (by all the evangelists) at the end of Jesus's life. Jesus's students' bathing the people and the nervousness of the Pharisees is from John 4.

In Chapter 13, the episode at Sychar is from John 4, while the episode in Nazareth is from Luke. Matthew's being there and also being the one alluded to by the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is fiction. The call of Matthew is from Matthew, but, in Chapter 14, that he had something to do with Pontius Pilate is fiction. See the Matthew novel.

In Chapter 15, the incident of the paralyzed boy being let down through the roof is in all the Synoptics. Judas's interpretations are what a rational thinker might theorize about Jesus. He is tragically wrong, of course. Andrew's discussion with Jesus about fairness is obviously fiction.

Chapter 16 mentions my own speculation that Jesus intended, if he was accepted as King, to restore the state before the fall of Adam, into a world without suffering or death. The episode of the son of the Widow of Nain is from Luke 7, though everything else about David is fictional.

In Chapter 17, what happened at the feast Matthew gave, except that there *was* a feast, and that people complained about Jesus consorting with sinners, is fictional, especially the episode of the dogs. Joseph's death is an inference from the fact that he

is not mentioned in the Gospels, though Mary is. The episode of the military officer's son is from the end of John 4. Of course, the "fact" that his assistant had any connection with Matthew is fiction. The Sermon on the Mount is in both Luke and Matthew; I used Luke's version, since it was probably closer to what Jesus actually said (Matthew edited Luke's version, I think, based on what he knew from other incidents that Jesus meant). The reaction is what I imagined it must have been; it is hinted at in the Gospels. The discussion among the followers is mainly my own musings on the subject.

In Chapter 18, Jesus's choosing pairs of students to go out is in the Synoptics, though who is paired with whom is not specified. What happened with the demon was made up. The rich young man is also in all the Synoptics. The declaring of Simon as the Rock is in the Synoptics, and is alluded to in the beginning of John; the first prediction of the Passion follows this in the Synoptics.

In Chapter 19, Matthew's return and David's strange behavior is fiction. The trip to Judea and the episode at the pool is in John; much of it is almost a verbatim quote. Judas's reaction is what I think a "rational" follower of Jesus would believe. The visit to Martha and Lazarus is not in the Gospels, but is hinted at (though there is no indication that Mary was not there; her being Mary Magdalene is the result of my fevered brain). I put the story of the rich man and Lazarus there to give an added twist to it.

In Chapter 20, the boy with the demon is in all the Synoptics, though of course there is no mention of Nathanael as the one who could not cure him (Nathanael is only mentioned by John; the others, in the list of the Twelve, refer

to Bartholomew, which is a patronymic, and scholars assume it is the same person as Nathanael). The event on Mount Tabor is not described, because only the Rock, James, and John witnessed it; it is mentioned in all the Synoptics, and alluded to in the Second Letter of the Rock.

In Chapter 21, Jesus's being asleep in the boat is in all the Synoptics, as is the episode with Legion. The woman with seven devils is alluded to by Luke, and the episode of the woman drying her tears from Jesus's feet is also from Luke (I made them the same woman, and also Mary Magdalene, and also Mary of Bethany; see the Mary novel). This carries over into Chapter 22 and Chapter 23; the story of the Prodigal Son is also from Luke, though it in the Gospels it is not in this context. The discussion about the various offices is in the Synoptics. The woman with the hemorrhage is in the Synoptics, as is the episode with Jairus. (Of course, who her daughter was is my imagination). The story of the workers in the vineyard is from Matthew.

In Chapter 24, the incident of the "mistake" of offering wine to Thomas is fiction, as is John's looking at Mary; but James's mother requesting favors for James and John is in Mark and Matthew. The "seventy times seven" is in Luke and Matthew.

In Chapter 25, Andrew is concerned with the workers in the vineyard, which is, as I said, from Matthew. In Chapter 26, Judas's interpretation of Jesus as mad is my imagination, of course. But the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water (Chapter 27) is in all of the Gospels, including John; in fact, I used John's version.

In Chapter 27, the Bread of Life speech is almost verbatim

from John. In Chapter 28, what happened between John and Ezra is my imagination, though Jesus's meeting with his relatives through his mother is in all the Synoptics. I fused this with John's mention of Jesus's relatives exhorting him to go to Judea.

In Chapter 29, the tarantula was my imagination, as is John's struggle with Judas. The tribute to Caesar is in all the Synoptics, and the woman caught in adultery is in John only. "You will die in your sins" is also from John, as is what Jesus said about Abraham and I AM.

In Chapter 30, Judas's revealing to Andrew John's attraction is my imagination. The man who had been born blind is from John. (Doctor Nothing by the way, is John of the Cross). The episode with Martha and Mary is from Luke. What Ezra said about Thomas's father is my imagination, as is his description of his fight with Judas.

In Chapter 31, the Feast of Dedication is in John, as is the death and resurrection of Lazarus. In Chapter 32, where the group is in John, but the preparations for the feast at Lazarus's house is my imagination, though what happened there, including the washing of the feet with nard, and Judas's reaction is from John; and it is there in John that we learn that Judas had been embezzling the group's money. Of course, what happened with Judith afterwards is my imagination. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem is in all the Gospels; I followed John, mainly.

In Chapter 33, the episode with the Greek-speakers is from John. How Jesus prepared for the Passover is in the Synoptics, who act as if it was the Passover dinner, though John makes it clear that the Passover dinner was the next

evening. The episode of washing the feet is from John, as is Jesus's informing John who the traitor was. That John (and Andrew) tried to stop Judas is my imagination. The rest of Jesus's words that night are from John.

In Chapter 34, the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus is *not* in John, though it was alluded to much earlier in his Gospel; it is in the other three Gospels and the First Letter to the Corinthians. The agony in the garden is also not in John and in the three Synoptics; when Judas arrives, I follow John mainly. The Rock's betrayal is alluded to here; it is in all the Gospels. What happened on the "Pavement" is in John, but not Pilate's washing his hands; that is in Matthew. The falls on the Way of the Cross are tradition, but Simon the Cyrenian's carrying the cross for Jesus is in the Synoptics. The meeting of the mother and the women is in Luke. John, Clopas's Mary, Mary Magdalene and Jesus's mother at the cross is from John, as is the playing of dice for what he wore. The darkness is from the Synoptics.

In Chapter 35, the removal of Jesus is in the four Gospels, though Andrew's part in it is my imagination. Nicodemus's part, however, is mentioned by John. What Chusa's Joanna did and said is made up, as is the discussion on Saturday, as well as the reason for Thomas's absence.

In Chapter 36, the women's leaving to give Jesus a decent burial is in John and the Synoptics, and the return of John and the Rock is alluded to in John. What the women said is from the Synoptics, and Mary Magdalene tells what John narrates about her at the tomb. Samuel's appearing is based on Matthew's statement that many dead people appeared after Jesus's death. Jesus's appearance, of course, is in all four

Gospels. The episode in Galilee is from John. Note that in the Greek, different words for “love” are used; I tried to show this by making the English words different.